

Md. Nazrul Islam *Editor*

Silk Road to Belt Road

Reinventing the Past and Shaping the
Future

 Springer

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Dedicated to all the participants in the first and second interdisciplinary forum hosted by the United International College, Zhuhai, China, and those who perceive and promote interdisciplinary values in academia.

Preface

Belt and Road Initiative's arguable geoeconomic vision and/or geopolitical ambition of the current Chinese leadership is obviously a venue for cultural interaction and exchange. This book approaches China's Belt and Road Initiative as a process of culturalization which started from the journey of the Silk Road and continued over the millennium. Belt and Road Initiative in mainstream literature has been perceived as to the geoeconomic vision and geopolitical ambition of the current Chinese leadership in shaping the future of the world. This book argues that although geopolitics and geoeconomy have role, BRI fundamentally creates venue for meeting the culture through promoting people-to-people interaction and exchange. This book explores the journey from Silk Road to Belt Road through analysing the topics ranging from history to religion, language to culture, and environment to health. Scholars, academics, researchers, and undergraduate to graduate students from Humanity, Social Sciences, and Business will find an alternative thought in looking Belt and Road Initiative from this volume.

This is a collection of the papers presented in the 2nd Interdisciplinary Forum on "Belt-Road Connectivity and Eurasian Integration: Meeting the Culture" held at the United International College, Zhuhai, China, from March 25 to March 26, 2018. I would like to acknowledge all the participants of the forum including paper presenters, session chairs, session discussants, and audiences, who came from far or near. The forum could not be a reality without their participation. I would also like to acknowledge Prof. Ching-Fai Ng, President, United International College, for his heartfelt encouragement and generous support in organizing this forum and editing this book.

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July 2018

Md. Nazrul Islam

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Chapter 17

Belt and Road Initiative for Kazakhstan: Opportunities and Risks



Fatima Kukeyeva and Dauren Dyussebayev

17.1 Introduction

The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the Sea Silk Way are critical components of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). On 16 September 2013 at Nazarbayev University in Astana, the Chinese premier Xi Jinping presented a comprehensive and ambitious initiative, SREB, which would extend across the entire Eurasian continent. SREB went on to receive full support in Central Asian countries, in particular in Kazakhstan where the search for economically effective corridors, market expansion, establishment of equal access to common infrastructure, and attracting investments in its economy are absolutely vital. Kazakhstan plays an important role in world economic process, because of its significant reserves of natural resources and its location at the intersection of major transcontinental trade and transportation routes.

Since Kazakhstan's independence, hydrocarbons have been the locomotive that has propelled the growth of the state's economy. The country is extremely dependent on mining and, in particular, on the oil sector. In 2017, oil sales account for 12–18% of GDP, and, accordingly, the country's budget is built more on income associated with the sale of oil. Despite the fact that in 2018 the weight of Kazakh oil in the world production amounted 1.8%, the price of oil remains as the key factor. Therefore, the dependence of Kazakhstan's economy on the fluctuation of the world energy prices is quite high (Mk-kz.kz 2018).

Kazakhstan, with its enormous territory, small population, and lack of sea access, has always been located on the periphery of the global trade of goods. Participation

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in the BRI and the consequent implantation of the SREB will allow Kazakhstan to move away from its dependence on the export of hydrocarbons and to develop other sectors of its economy. As a large country with substantial borders and routes that extend from east to west and north to south, Kazakhstan is capable of providing safe transport corridors while also having the means to modernize and create new routes independently.

In 2014 President Nursultan Nazarbayev announced the creation of the Kazakhstan national transport program “Nurly Zhol.” The program’s main goal is to drive state and foreign direct investment into critical infrastructure and priority sectors for economic growth. Around \$ 9 billion US dollars are planned to be spent on shift productivity to agribusiness, manufacturing, trade and logistics, tourism, information technology and finance, and away from the oil sector.

“Nurly Zhol” has allowed Kazakhstan to integrate effectively into BRI. China reacted extremely positively to the program as many of its top priorities mirrored those of SREB. One of the decisive factors in the success of this project will be the Chinese investments which are vital for the country’s transit modernization.

Without the necessary transport infrastructure, Kazakhstan’s vast open spaces would be a barrier, but with that infrastructure, they would be an advantage. Consequently Kazakhstan’s interest in the success of this initiative is evident.

17.2 Literature Review

Among experts there are two levels of discussion concerning the BRI. The first concern is China’s declaration about a new geopolitical concept focused at neighboring countries (with Central Asia being at the forefront). The second level is related to the ongoing investigations concerning the various aspects of the SREB and what part Kazakhstan plays in them. The experts of the first level draw attention to the geopolitical nature of the BRI, viewing it as a key measure in China’s transformation into the world’s factory, allowing it to bring goods to international markets, and putting it on the same level as the USA and European countries (Syroezhkin 2016). The BRI aims to achieve military, political, and cultural goals by increasing China’s influence on a regional and worldwide level (Caa-network.org 2018).

The experts of the second level positively viewed SREB. Kazakhstan’s participation in this project will open up exciting possibilities: the chance to maximize its transit potential and modernize its transport and logistical infrastructure. All of the possible transport corridors going through region would use Kazakhstan as a transit and logistical hub which would allow for substantial economic gains: to increase the transit possibilities of the country, to raise the volume of trade turnover, to develop the transport and logistic infrastructure, and to ensure investment inflows (Amrebayev 2017). Russian experts also view Kazakhstan as the main beneficiary of Chinese investments among Central Asian countries due to its overall importance as a transport link (Minchenko 2015).

Despite a positive assessment, domestic experts warn about possible risks for Kazakhstan in the implementation of the SREB. One of the main risks is the lack of a clear strategy laid out for how to use these investments to develop non-energy-related sectors of the economy, such as agriculture and manufacturing. Much discussion has been dedicated to the question of integrating SREB with the “Nurly Zhol” program and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (Kazantseva 2015). For China, transit is the strategic importance. Beijing understands economic integration, primarily as an expansion of the sales markets for its products (Bnews.kz 2017).

But experts have not excluded that Beijing’s ambitious plans may end up contradicting Russia’s integration processes (Izimov 2016: 57–58). “National egoism” and a lack of coordination between EEU members, in particular between the founding members, hinder successful cohesion between the Eurasian project and China’s global initiative BRI (Kaukenov 2017).

Apart from economic problems, analysts have also discussed cultural differences and how they may hinder successful realization of SREB. One relevant issue considers Chinese investments and how they are followed by Chinese labor into a region with a glut of labor resources (Syroezhkin 2014: 25). The SREB project will not only be able to assure China control over the movement of goods, services, capital, and people but will also considerably enhance its demographic and geopolitical presence in each of the countries along the route (Gaifutdinova 2015).

The question of how to combat the spread of existing phobias and fears about China in Kazakhstan society is a relevant issue that would help to develop bilateral relations in terms of SREB’s implementation. Among other factors that feed Sino-phobia are attempts by politicians and elite groups to take advantage of anti-China sentiments, as well as a lack of knowledge about China, its culture, language, and traditions (Burkhanov and Chen 2016). Today debates about the nature of Chinese projects that fall under this initiative take place at the level of theoretical discussions and do not impede the implementation of SREB objectives. The Kazakhstani analytical community studying the BRI is still forming, as is the BRI and one of its components, the SREB.

17.3 Methodology

Through analysis of the Republic of Kazakhstan’s participation in the SREB, as a part of the Chinese BRI, the authors of this paper understand that the development of the country’s transit potential is part of a process toward the emergence of real international integrity. The stated issue in this paper has been analyzed through the prism of sustainable development theory. “Nurly Zhol” should be viewed as a part of Kazakhstan’s program for sustainable development. The opportunities and risks of Kazakhstan’s involvement in SREB project are connected to a whole array of socioeconomic and political factors. To address these issues and to respond to the possible risks, the government structures will have to correlate their involvement in the SREB vis-à-vis economic and natural patterns into the foreseeable future. For

there to be effective results, the government must evaluate these projects not only on the potential for profit. Economic projects that bring quick and considerable profits but are implemented without consideration of long-term economic, social, and environmental consequences may ultimately turn out to be disadvantageous.

Content analysis has revealed the prevailing ideas of the BRI in official and expert publications, as well as their broadcast channels in Central Asian societies. The content analysis method is also used in studying political discourse, which is considered especially effective in the study of methods and mechanisms for the implementation of the SREB in Kazakhstan. The concept of “transnational social spaces” was used by the authors to analyze the BRI’s humanitarian aspect, which is aimed at the dissemination of China’s “soft power” in various strata of society such as the elite, intellectuals, public organizations, civil society, etc.

17.4 The SREB Project in Kazakhstan: Opportunities and Risks

In an attempt to diversify its economy, the government of Kazakhstan has attached particular importance to the intensive development of transport infrastructure. Since 2015 the “Nurly Zhol” program, aimed at the modernization of the country’s transport assets, has been underway. By 2020 projects totaling over 40 billion dollars will be completed (Kushkumbayev 2015). Funds supplied by international banks will go toward the construction of highways from the center to the south, east, and west of the country. This will fulfill one of the aims of “Nurly Zhol” – to connect the capital with major regions based on the “radial principle.” Thanks to its geopolitical position as a transport link in the system of multileveled interactions between Asia and Europe, Kazakhstan announced its intention to become a regional transit hub.

For Kazakhstan, China is an indispensable partner, creditor, and investor. In monetary terms, Chinese investments totaled 623.9 million dollars in 2016 (Tengrinews.kz 2016). In order to identify how much China’s plans are in keeping with Kazakhstan’s plans for reindustrialization with potential for expansion in bilateral cooperation and the possibility of integrating SREB and “Nurly Zhol” into the EEU format, the opportunities and risks for Kazakhstan in the BRI should be addressed.

17.4.1 Opportunities the SREB Project Offers to Kazakhstan

Cooperation between Kazakhstan and China can contribute to the development of Kazakhstan’s transit potential. The Chinese ideas of SREB and “Nurly Zhol” have converging interests in the development of transport and logistic infrastructure on Kazakhstan’s territory. This is what the 2016–2017 agreements between Kazakhstan

and China and the issuance of credit lines from China aimed at. A “road map” to expand bilateral cooperation in all sectors of the economy, along with the creation of a joint working group on the integration of the SREB and “Nurly Zhol,” has been created. According to the plans, four areas of cooperation are anticipated (ibid).

The first area – development of a transit corridor, creation of logistical centers in Kazakhstan, and the simplification of procedures (customs, tax, financial, etc.) with the intention to expand bilateral trade. Kazakhstan’s goal is to pick up part of the trade flow between China and Europe.

The second area – joint industrial projects

In September 2015, President Nazarbayev reported on the decision to relocate 51 Chinese factories to Kazakhstan. Chief among these are the construction of a copper-smelting factory in East Kazakhstan Region, a polypropylene plant in Atyrau Region, and the modernization of the Shymkent oil-refining factory. As part of the SREB initiative, there are plans for projects financed by the Silk Road Fund and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The overall cooperation program includes over 26 billion dollars of Chinese investments (Bnews.kz 2016).

The third area – cooperation in science-driven and high-tech sectors

Astana and Beijing are considering one to two areas in which Kazakhstan and China will collaborate at the level of scientific institutes and universities, as well as in the creation of joint enterprises (ibid). For the time being discussions are underway about the areas in which Kazakhstan and China will collaborate, neither institutes nor universities where the collaboration would be carried out have been finalized.

The fourth area – cooperation in agriculture

Today Kazakhstan and China are working on 19 projects totaling more than 1.7 billion dollars. Agreements have been reached recently about the creation of several major joint projects in the agriculture sector (ibid). For example, the Chinese company Rifa Holding Group aims to invest in the construction of a meat-packing plant in East Kazakhstan Region. Eighty percent of the plants’ production will be exported to China. The project is estimated at 7.9 billion tenge. The CITIC Corporation signed an agreement with the “Baiterek” Holding Company to undertake projects relating to feed lots and poultry farms. The Hong Kong financial group “Oriental Patron” plans to invest in the Kazakhstan company “Kazeksportastyk” to develop agricultural product processing with goods destined for the Chinese market. The investments total around 500 million dollars (Alibekova 2016).

All the aforementioned facts are proof that areas of integration between “Nurly Zhol” and SREB have not only been found but have taken shape in the form of concrete projects, but more importantly, they have already been funded. A major jump took place in 2014–2015 when guaranteed Chinese investments into the Kazakhstan economy grew threefold (Syroezhkin 2016).

In 2016 Kazakhstan completed construction on its part of the international transit highway corridor – Western Europe – Western China. The railroad line Khorgos-Almaty-Taraz-Shymkent-Kyzylorda-Aktau with the Borzhakty-Ersay branch has been completed, along with the infrastructural framework for the ferry complex

“Kuryk” on the Caspian Sea Coast with a capacity of four million tons of cargo per year. Aktau’s port is being modernized (Kuzmina 2017). The role of the original driver of these and other projects is assigned to the Asian Bank of Infrastructure Investments with an authorized capital of 100 billion dollars and the Silk Road Fund, which has a \$ 40 billion (Kushkumbayev 2015). By implementing the SREB project, China is expanding its list of investments into Kazakhstan’s economy. Apart from the oil and gas sector, Chinese money will go toward infrastructure, industry, agriculture, and tourism, among others.

For Kazakhstan the harmonization in relations between “Nurly Zhol,” SREB, and the EEU is critical. The EEU and SREB are two of the most tangible projects that will lay the foundation for a Greater United Eurasian Economic Community. The EEU orients toward the post-Soviet space with the reindustrialization of its members being its primary goal, along with the creation of a common economic space which would provide for freedom of movement, goods, services, capital, and labor. Despite the fact that SREB is not an integration project per se, its main goal, nonetheless, is the creation of favorable conditions for the movement of Chinese goods to the markets of Central Asia, Russia, Europe, and countries of the Near and Middle East, which coincides with the interests of the Eurasian Economic Union’s members.

The integration of all three projects would become a model of the shift from competition to a level of intercountry, intercontinental economic cooperation. Between “Nurly Zhol,” SREB, and the EEU, Kazakhstan could act as a bridge in China and Russia’s multidimensional relations.

17.4.2 Challenges and Risks of Kazakhstan’s Participation in the SREB Project

In taking advantage of new opportunities and benefits of cooperation with China as part of the SREB, Kazakhstan must minimize possible risks and challenges. It is clear that when countries with considerable differences in potential are involved in joint projects, this inevitably creates contradictions not only of an economic character but a political, sociocultural, and environmental one as well. To manage these risks and challenges, Kazakhstani politicians and experts need a strategy based not on short-term profits (financing and investing) but on long-term perspectives that would protect the state’s national interests.

There is a certain ambiguity in the perception of the Chinese initiative among the Kazakhstani public that is worth noting. Discourse from the political elite conveys a positive perception of bilateral cooperation in all areas, while at the same time, social discourse brings light to fears and phobias.

While Kazakh authorities make claims about future prospects, there is an increased anxiety in society around the consequences of such a shift. It is possible that these apprehensions are baseless since there is little information about these

businesses, the amount of jobs that will be created for the local population, environmental assessments, etc. (Contur.kz 2017). For example, by announcing relocation of 51 Chinese enterprises to Kazakhstan, the Ministry for Investments and Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan has neither published a list of the businesses nor a program of the bilateral industrial-investment cooperation, which would allow for real evaluation of the opportunities associated with these projects (Kuzmina 2017).

The shifting and creation of joint Kazakhstani-Chinese businesses in Kazakhstan is justified if they are created in areas where Kazakhstan itself is unable to due to lack of investments or qualified labor. A special government commission and the conclusions reached by independent experts must determine the level of demand for any given business. The implementation of investment projects must facilitate the inflow of new technologies, the organization of technology parks, and the production of goods for export to third countries, job creation, and, as a whole, economic growth. Otherwise, there is a risk of protest riots in the local population against government actions.

The Chinese government has launched a new political model “ecological civilization” that aims to minimize environmental pollution in China, introduce “green technology,” etc. (Green 2017). To this end, the question of which businesses China plans to relocate to Kazakhstan becomes relevant (operation of productions, environmental safety, outlook on product distribution, etc.). Importing businesses with “dirty” technology threatens the development of “yesterday’s” resource economy in Central Asian countries while delaying their technological development in relation to China.

The implementation of the SREB may cause social risks for the Central Asian region. According to the official statements by Kazakh authorities, SREB projects aim to create new jobs which are an appealing argument for a region with a surplus of labor. However, due to the preferential loans provided by China through state banks, the associated projects are carried out by Chinese companies and Chinese labor. For example, Chinese train manufacturers are expecting the highest returns, which means the usage of Chinese materials, management, and labor. Kazakhstani manufacturers will have to make due with the remaining contracting business (En.ndrc.gov.cn 2015). This and other examples explain not only Chinese interests but also the reluctance of Kazakhstan and Central Asian countries to support the SREB’s implementation in terms of personnel and technological needs.

In the first half of 2015, 12,360 Chinese citizens received Kazakhstan work permits (in 2014 there was a total of 6500). It is clear that as surplus Chinese labor comes to Kazakhstan at the beginning of the project’s implementation and that China’s labor migrant population will multiply several times over (Nur.kz 2015). As a member of the WTO, Kazakhstan cannot sharply limit the flow of Chinese labor migration – all that’s left to do is hope for China’s good will. There is no information on agreements available in the public domain addressing labor migration quotas from China within the SREB project. Such uncertainty is caused by frustration among Kazakhstan and Central Asia’s population.

One way for labor migrant to solve this complicated issue is with the help of the “market in exchange for technology and training” mechanism. This trend must replace the former one of “raw materials in exchange for investments.” Before starting production in Kazakhstan, Chinese businesses must train local workers. Sooner or later the money received as investments and credit will run out, but the problem of untrained personnel will remain.

Kazakh authorities should refer to China’s well-known practice of strictly regulating any foreign presence in its economy. First of all, the policy aims to overall limit the presence of foreign businesses (no more than 25%) and also in key areas of China’s economy such as in the production of tea, rice, and Chinese medicinal products. Secondly, China was interested more so in the retraining of its personnel as opposed to money. Now, China no longer needs foreign investments, and it creates technology itself and, most importantly, has its own personnel that understand the logic of developing a modern world market (Expertonline.kz 2017). When implementing the SREB, the Kazakh authorities can use the main ideas of this experience.

Anti-Chinese sentiments are a serious roadblock in the implementation of SREB. While Kazakhstan and Central Asian elites welcome the flow of finances, Chinese businesses have been encountering xenophobia from the local population. One of the most widespread fears is that Chinese economic, demographic, and military expansion will, as a result, lead to a loss of sovereignty. Kazakh authorities unintentionally incited another wave of Sino-phobia in 2010 when it was announced that Kazakhstan would lease farmland to China over the course of several decades which quickly prompted protests. Ultimately the deal did not go through (Sultangalieva 2016). This caused Beijing to study the program’s vulnerability from a security standpoint.

Kazakh people believe that, as a whole, the investments give little to nothing of value to the population. They accuse the authorities of corruption. There are also fears around the region’s environment. This combination of nationalism, grievances about corruption, and environmental pollution strengthen anti-Chinese and anti-government sentiments. Local manufacturers see the inflow of Chinese goods into Kazakhstan as a threat since they are not able to compete with Chinese companies.

It is also clear that, despite the geographical proximity and cultural-historical past, there is a lack of experience in mutual communication and mutual understanding between Kazakh and Chinese societies. For all intents and purposes, there is no Kazakh school of sinologists which would be able to combat stereotypes and the alarmist vision of China.

17.4.3 Steps That Kazakhstan Must Take to Ensure a Successful Implementation of the SREB Project

In order to redress the current situation, the SREB must be about more than highways and routes. The rebirth of the Silk Way is a means to bring together those who live along this route. In SREB documents, the people-to-people area is represented

via multidimensional humanitarian collaboration including the areas of education, culture and the arts, tourism, healthcare, youth politics, science, and technology.

The Kazakh side must raise the question of expanding cultural-humanitarian cooperation and building bridges between people, for example, through the expansion of cooperation in the fields of education, science, and healthcare. This will allow for Kazakhstanis to better recognize and understand Kazakhstan's strategic partnership with China.

A sociological study in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan revealed that among 300 respondents (representatives of the young, educated elite in both countries), 96% of respondents had a positive view of Chinese investments. The most negative opinion was in relation to the inflow of Chinese immigrants – 80% of respondents. Seventy percent of respondents were concerned about environmental pollution (Caa net-work.org 2018). According to this study, the older and middle generation in Kazakhstan is fearful and apprehensive about the policies of their Great Neighbor. But at the same time, Kazakhstani youth is forming its own view of the Celestial Empire through engagement with China's "soft power." It's clear that traditional Sino-phobia coexists alongside a new phenomenon – a positive view of China (ibid.).

Education must play a key role in bringing the civil societies of the two countries closer together. Kazakhstan's universities must take into account how innovations in the internalization of higher education can aid in the training of highly qualified specialists prepared for the new realities of the geo-economic BRI.

In addition to training specialists with practical knowledge, it is necessary to prepare students for international outlook, innovative thinking, and knowledge of foreign languages in the regional countries of the New Silk Road.

It is safe to say that China has attained the status as one of the most popular countries where young people of Central Asia go to study. Recipients of the Presidential Scholarship "Bolashak" go to China for their studies. This is also enabled by the growing number of scholarships issued by the Chinese government, specialized scholarships for Silk Way countries, organization of cultural events, and so on. Agreements have been signed between the countries on science and technological cooperation and mutual recognition of higher education documents. Confucius Institutes operate in Kazakhstan. Kazakhstani students have an excellent opportunity to study Chinese at the Confucius Institute which has been operating successfully at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and is considered one of the best in Central Asia. All the necessary material and logistical conditions are in place, professors from China teach classes, and there are frequent cultural events. The institute works in close cooperation with the Department of Oriental Studies and the Department of International Relations. Every year enrollment in Chinese language classes increases.

The leading university in Kazakhstan, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, works with 35 Chinese universities in different areas, jointly working on scientific projects as well as preparing specialists. At Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, 168 Chinese students are enrolled – this includes 76 who are taking language courses to eventually matriculate into a university. KazNU is part of the two univer-

sity network consortiums – University Network of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the University Network of the Shanghai Cooperation Agreement. As a primary university coordinator in the SCA University network, KazNU participates in the implementation of MA programs in the areas of “environment,” “regional studies,” and “nanotechnology.” Many Chinese universities are partners in the training of specialists in these areas (Kaznu.kz 2014). Favorable public opinion should become the foundation for cooperation in the Belt and Road Initiative. Nongovernmental forms of cultural exchange should be more diverse, and communication among business and cultural elites should be established.

The rise of Sino-phobia can be stopped with the help of the mass media, the internet, the public diplomacy, a large-scale PR campaign that would clarify the goals and purposes of the SREB, its integration with “Nurly Zhol,” and the expected dividends for the local population and the state. It is essential to explain to the public questions associated with the transfer of excess Chinese manufacturing capacity to Kazakhstan, as well as joint projects in the agriculture sector. Easily available information would dispel speculation and rumors.

It is important to convey to the population that the SREB project offers substantial opportunities for the country’s development. In Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, there is an understanding that partnering with China gives more benefits than actual risks. Creating enterprises in Kazakhstan will set in motion the intellectual and technical growth of the nation. Collaboration in agriculture will allow Kazakhstan to successfully export not only to China’s food market but to the markets of third countries as well.

To foster constructive discussion and critique the impact of SREB on the socio-economic landscape in Kazakhstan, it is important that there will be a wide range of experts, including independent experts, who would not be restricted in preparing analytical materials for branches of government and who would develop tools to influence public opinion. Building constructive relations with China must be based on cohesive expertise concerning the pluses and minuses in decision-making. The question of developing principles and framework for cooperation with China remains relevant. Experts must thoroughly analyze the objective benefits of each side and correspondingly, clarify and adjust the agenda of bilateral cooperation. A lack of quality expertise on the Chinese problematic will make it impossible for Kazakhstan to form its own agenda in how bilateral relations develop further. Despite the expansion and deepening of cooperation and growth of China’s influence in the world, in Kazakhstan there is a lack of demand for a “think tank on China.” These, among other factors, explain the absence of a school of sinologists in Kazakhstan.

How to simplify customs and visa procedures so as to remove barriers for the expansion of trade and tourism is a question that remains open. People-to-people diplomacy brings the two societies closer together and reduces the level of fear relative to one another. One of the five main directions declared in China’s partnership with the Silk Way countries is the “bringing together of peoples.” This consists of a wide range of areas for collaboration: cultural exchanges, scientific contacts, partnerships between mass media and volunteer organizations, and tourism among others.

Today many Kazakhstanis do business and have other economic ties with Chinese partners, study or receive medical assistance in China, enjoy Chinese cuisine, and visit the Middle Kingdom as tourists. “People-to-people” diplomacy must be supported by visa mechanisms, among others.

17.5 Conclusion

SREB project affects various areas of development in many states and the entire regions of the world: security, sociocultural, political-diplomatic, and civilizational aspects of their existence. It is undeniable that the SREB brings many new opportunities for Kazakhstan. Astana can use these opportunities only if it manages to ensure that the project is built on conditions favorable for Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan’s involvement in the Chinese BRI will enable the diversification of the economy and the development of the non-commodity sector, providing for long-term sustainable development. Kazakhstan’s strategy consists of advocating for its interests in the following ways. It requires that joint contracts with China meet certain criteria and standards in various areas (law, technology, environment, etc.) with the input of independent and international experts. The integration of SREB and “Nurly Zhol” will allow for Kazakhstan to step back from its former practice of “raw materials in exchange for investment” and turn to developing its economy based on the strengthening of its transport infrastructure.

Apart from the possibilities, the implementation of the SREB contains risks that the Kazakhstani side needs to manage. The main risks are in the economical, as well as the ideological and civilizational, spheres. The necessity of developing a program between SREB, EEU, and Nurly Zhol is evident. The absence of such a program will create difficulties for Kazakhstan to realize its multi-vector foreign policy.

In order to effectively protect its national interests, Kazakhstani politicians and experts must develop a strategy to popularize the BRI among Kazakhstani society. On the one hand, this will help to alleviate phobias and fears about the Chinese presence in Kazakhstan. The strategy must aim to provide information to the population on the integration process (under what conditions, where, and with what prospects for the future). This will help to quell rumors and speculation, as well as anti-Chinese sentiments.

On the other hand, the strategy must aim to strengthening the ties between Kazakhstan and China in the humanitarian sphere. Education and culture must be the driving forces in this area. If the number of students studying at Chinese universities has been rising, then the cultural-humanitarian sphere must be expanded and deepened. Work in this area must not only focus on Chinese culture and its achievements but also aim to develop cultural and humanitarian cooperation based on the “two-way street” principle. The educational component of bilateral relations must be complemented by cooperation in analytical and research areas. Customs and visa procedures should be simplified in order to remove barriers so as to expand trade and tourism. The better we know one another, the more effective our partnership will be.

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