

India & SCO in the 21st century

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India-SCO: New Platform, Common Ground

by **Rajiv Bhatia**, Distinguished Fellow,
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India will host the 19th meeting of the Council of Heads of Government on 30 November 2020. This will be the first meeting of the grouping's second highest organ, hosted by India. The significance of the event lies in the timing – India's relations with two fellow member-states, China and Pakistan, are at an exceptionally low ebb; yet the clear message from the SCO Secretariat and other member-states is: India's presence in the SCO is highly beneficial to the latter and should be fully leveraged to strengthen it as an important and upcoming intergovernmental organisation. This necessitates a fresh appraisal of options for India.

The SCO represents 42% of the world's population, 22% of the land area and 20% of global GDP. Its goal, when it began two decades ago in June 2001, was to strengthen regional security and economic cooperation, and remains so.

The group has expanded considerably from its six original member-states, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. India and Pakistan have joined as full-fledged members, while Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus and Mongolia are 'Observers' awaiting full membership. Besides, there are six 'Dialogue Partners' - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey - invited to the SCO drawing room as well.

It's an odd mix of Asian nations – rivals and adversaries, neglected states and regions, the ambitious and the quiet, suppliers and consumers – with seemingly little in common. But that is precisely why attention must be paid to it. The SCO's appeal for India increased when the latter secured Observer status in July 2005. Full membership came in June 2017 simultaneously with Pakistan, which made the SCO central to New Delhi's concerns and priorities.

Geopolitically, the membership of China and Pakistan, India's principal adversaries, poses a formidable constraint, especially after the Galwan clash between Chinese and Indian troops in June 2020 and the continuing conflict and impasse in eastern Ladakh. Nevertheless, the presence of Russia and four Central Asian Republics (CARs) enhances the SCO's attractiveness for New Delhi. The membership increases India's political and strategic weight and provides extra leverage through the multilateral connections of other members such as Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan which are members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). As Professor Nirmala Joshi aptly observed, the SCO's space is of "vital interest to India. The CARs are part of its extended/strategic neighbourhood."¹

For the SCO, India is a valuable potential asset, with its ability to connect the grouping to South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region through the Act East Policy.

Until recently, the SCO has been a regional grouping dedicated more to developing political and security partnership rather than economic cooperation.² This has been changing gradually. India's formal entry into this organisation, as a full member, coincided with the latter's shift to strengthening commercial and economic linkages, both within and externally.

In the above context, two specific factors need to be reckoned with. First, the SCO's 'Development Strategy' until 2025³ spells out the goals and key areas of its interest: political cooperation, cooperation in security, trade and economic cooperation, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, and international cooperation (i.e. with the UN etc.). Second, the mandate of the Council of Heads of Government is essentially to approve "the budget of the Organization, consider and decide upon major issues related to particular, especially economic, spheres of interaction within the Organization."⁴

¹ Nirmala Joshi 'The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: An Assessment', Vivekananda International Foundation, Issue Brief, 2015. <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-an-assessment.pdf>

² Lecture on The Future Trajectory of the SCO and India's Role' by Ambassador Vladimir Norov, Secretary General, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 13 January 2020. He observed: "I want to emphasize that the SCO was originally created as an organisation of interaction in security sphere. But gradually, there was a common understudying to actively develop and support the work in the area of trade and economic ties." https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=1&ls_id=4610&lid=3483

³ <https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/node/1582> ⁴ <http://eng.sectsc.org/>

1. Trade and investment

The low level of intra-SCO trade is a defining reality. The present total trade turnover of the SCO countries is \$6 trillion, while intra-SCO trade stands at \$305 billion i.e. 5%. This is comparable with the dismal intra-SAARC trade at 5%, and compares poorly with the African Union's 16%, ASEAN's 27% and the EU's 50%. Clearly, SCO has a long way to go before its internal trade grows significantly.

For India, focusing on increasing its trade with the larger SCO economies, (viz. China and Russia), bilaterally or within other shared groupings like BRICS and EEU, should be a continuing endeavour. All the four Central Asian countries are important, India could prioritise ties with two of them, based on their market size and economic potential - Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Figure 1: Central Asian SCO Members - Population & GDP

Country	Population	GDP(nominal) per capita in USD
Kazakhstan	18 million	\$9,686
Uzbekistan	34 million	\$1,831
Kyrgyzstan	6 million	\$1,293
Tajikistan	9 million	\$807

Source: Compiled by the author

INDIAN OVERSEAS INVESTMENTS IN SCO

Investment in SCO Countries

COUNTRY	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
China P RP	60.2813	23.9353	35.8918
Russia	412.8627	474.2073	629.9568
Central Asian Region	85.9488	1.6131	2.9081
Kazakhstan	85.9473	1.4988	0.1233
Uzbekistan	0.0015	0.1143	2.7848
TOTAL	559.0928	499.7557	668.7567

Source: Reserve Bank of India, Gateway House Research

INDIA'S TRADE WITH SCO

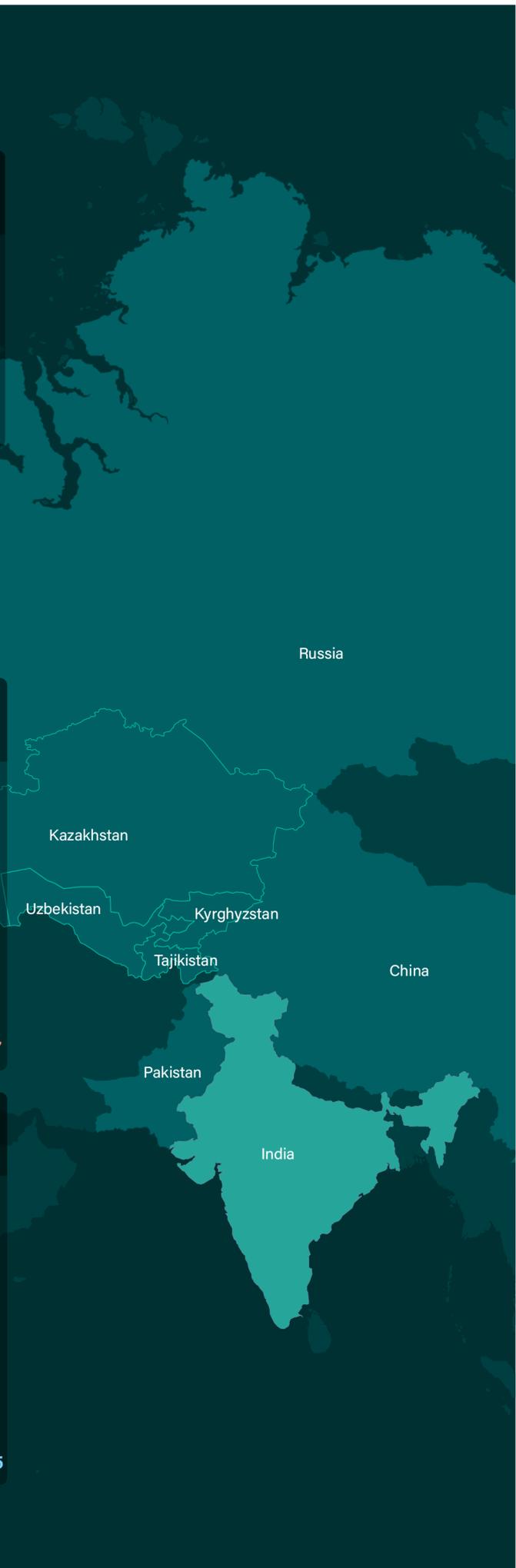
SCO Export Data

COUNTRY	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
China P RP	13,333.53	16,752.20	16,605.75
Russia	2,113.39	2,389.47	3,019.87
Pakistan IR	1,924.28	2,066.56	816.62
Central Asian Region	310.62	396.84	435.42
Kazakhstan	125.37	143.13	202.56
Kyrgyzstan	28.59	30.02	29.15
Tajikistan	23.94	22.28	23.50
Uzbekistan	132.72	201.41	180.21
TOTAL	17,681.82	21,605.07	20,877.67

SCO Import Data

COUNTRY	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
China P RP	76,380.70	70,319.64	65,260.66
Russia	8,573.46	5,840.44	7,093.75
Pakistan IR	488.56	494.87	13.97
Central Asian Region	1090.33	842.34	2,324.17
Kazakhstan	907.43	708.78	2,255.70
Kyrgyzstan	30.94	2.59	1.33
Tajikistan	50.29	4.24	0.29
Uzbekistan	101.67	126.73	66.85
TOTAL	86,533.06	77,497.29	74,692.55

Source: Ministry of Commerce, Government of India, Gateway House Research



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2. Economic cooperation

A major disincentive is that, despite multiple endeavours of the past and present, physical connectivity between India and the CARs remains inadequate. Making a prudent choice of goods and services that can be transported by air or offered through e-platforms, can sidestep this constraint. Indian e-commerce sites like IndiaMart are already popular in several parts of the world, and its products preferred are over Chinese rivals.

With digitisation becoming a central commitment of the Modi government, expanding it to friendly countries will fulfil some of the Prime Minister's HEALTH agenda which he put forward at the SCO summit in June 2019.⁵

Under it, 'E' stands for 'Economic Cooperation.' This was reiterated at the video conference of the SCO foreign ministers, by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on 13 May 2020. He pledged India's commitment "to work towards creation of a favourable environment for mutually beneficial trade-economic cooperation among the SCO members."⁶

A close look at the recent statements made by the SCO secretary general⁷ and a senior Indian official⁸ underlines the need for action on the following issues:

1. Active participation by India in the SCO Business Council and SCO Interbank Association. Forthcoming events to promote trade and investment linkages by FICCI and Invest India will be important milestones,
2. Greater contribution by India in the domain of digitisation and Information and Communication Technologies,
3. Startups and Innovation,
4. Science and Technology cooperation,
5. Traditional medicine, and
6. Humanitarian cooperation covering diverse areas such as health, education, culture, tourism and developing contacts among youth.

⁵ <https://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/31442/Translation+of+Prime+Ministers+intervention+at+the+SCO+Summit+2019+June+14+2019>

⁶ 'Video conference of the SCO Ministers of Foreign Affairs' 13 May 2020, Ministry of External Affairs. https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/32687/Video_conference_of_the_SCO_Ministers_of_Foreign_Affairs

⁷ Speech of the SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov at the webinar "India-SCO Engagement: The Next Steps" 2 September 2020.

⁸ Speech of MEA Secretary (West) Vikas Swarup at the webinar "India-SCO Engagement: The Next Steps" 2 September 2020.

3. New potential collaborations

In the assessment of Gateway House, the list below of areas suitable for future collaboration between India and SCO member-states, more specifically the CARs, deserves to be given serious consideration:

No.	Areas suitable for India-SCO collaboration
1.	Creative and sustained drive to strengthen India's trade and investment footprint in the Central Asian Region.
2.	E-commerce and digitisation
3.	Information and Communications Technology (ICT)
4.	Healthcare management (pharmaceuticals, tele-medicine, medical tourism and Aayush)
5.	Tourism
6.	Film production
7.	Training and skill development
8.	Enterprise and innovation
9.	Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) cooperation
10.	Agri-education
11.	Satellite cooperation
12.	Fintech, especially banking services

4. Recommendations

To move forward in the desired direction, three specific and practical measures are suggested below:

- The Central Asian states need to take steps for creating a change in business perceptions regarding their region. India Inc's apprehension and skepticism about a business-unfriendly climate, bureaucratic arbitrariness and apathy, and corruption in high places in the CARs need to be highlighted to the leadership. A sophisticated case needs to be made to persuade them for addressing these negative facets in their own interest.
- A close harmonisation of India Inc and India's miniscule band of SCO experts is essential. FICCI, the national apex chamber which serves as the lead for dialogue with the SCO, should be tasked to produce a detailed business study on short-to-medium-term prospects, with the help of a composite taskforce comprising business leaders and select representatives of the academic and strategic communities.
- As and when the India-China equation regains a semblance of normalcy, the two counties could jointly propose an annual business dialogue between the SCO and ASEAN, thereby expanding the CARs' potential market access and sources of investment. Both India and China have their ASEAN +1 dialogue platforms; they may have sufficient incentive to forge mutually beneficial cooperation with ASEAN in this domain.

SCO: Time for a revised Charter

by **Ambika Khanna**, Senior Researcher,
International Law Studies Programme

The expansion in membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) is an opportunity to review, possibly revise and widen the scope of its Charter to make it more suited to address the concerns of all its members, including new ones like India. This paper recommends what the changes in the SCO Charter ought to be by comparing it with the successful ASEAN charter.

Research assistance: Lakshesh Sihag, Former Intern, Gateway House.

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which initially began in 1996 as the Shanghai Five with China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, was officially formed in 2002 with the adoption of the Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the SCO Charter.

The primary motivations behind the formation of the SCO were to control terrorism, separatism and extremism in the region, and to enhance regional security and cooperation in areas such as politics, trade and economy, culture and more. Since its formation, the membership of the SCO has expanded to include nations such as India and Pakistan. Currently, the SCO accounts for a total GDP of \$18.4 trillion and almost 44% of the world population¹, thus, making it a body with the requisite power and capacity to have relevance, voice, and impact.

Over the years, along with the expansion in the SCO membership, there have been several regional developments such as China's Belt and Road Initiative, multilateral and unilateral trade sanctions, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions, all of which have led to regional instability and geopolitical uncertainty.

1. Comparison with ASEAN

This leads to the fundamental question – does the almost two-decade old SCO Charter require a revamp to remain relevant and to play a more intrinsic role in global affairs?

A charter is the holy book and the backbone of an institution – it defines the goal, governs the relationship between members, determines the modus operandi of the institution and provides substance and continuity to the institution. The charter of multilateral and plurilateral bodies like the SCO, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) serve similar purposes. Institutions that have robust charters, are more effective than others. Even the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which currently functions without a charter, is in the process of framing a charter in order to work in a well-coordinated manner with established rules, which in turn would make this multilateral more efficient and effective.²

The ASEAN, which has proved itself a success as a regional body, has an effective charter. Trade and investment ties between the member states, thrive under its aegis. Inward flows of intra-ASEAN FDI increased from \$4.5 billion in 2005 to \$24.5 billion in 2018. Intra-ASEAN trade has continuously accounted for the largest share of ASEAN total trade.

¹ Norov, Vladimir, 'Statement by H.E. Mr. Vladimir Norov Secretary-General SCO', Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, 25-28 February 2020 https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trans/events/2020/ITC/ppt/4c_Transport_corridors_SCO_final_82_session.pdf

² Statement by H.E. Mr. Don Pramudwinai, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, Report of the 16th BIMSTEC Ministerial Meeting, Kathmandu, August 29, 2018. Available at https://bimstec.org/?page_id=945

While the ASEAN and SCO operate in different geographies, both institutions have the common goal of a safe and secure Asia-Pacific, and also seek mutual cooperation in the domains of trade, economics, connectivity. This is evident from the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two multilaterals in 2005. A study and analysis of the ASEAN and SCO charters, therefore, is instructive.

To further strengthen the cooperation and exchange of knowledge between ASEAN and SCO, the SCO can establish a Consultative Group with ASEAN. This will serve two purposes; one, facilitate the strengthening of the SCO Charter by adopting the best practices under the ASEAN framework, and two, intensify and accelerate a long overdue cooperation between the two bodies on security, economics, finance and other sectors.

2. Recommended changes in the SCO Charter

The SCO Action Plan 2018-2022 envisages the SCO as a catalyst to create a polycentric world. But, with the SCO charter in its current form, the strategy seems unrealistic and far-fetched. A comparison of the two charters reveals shortcomings in the SCO Charter, and makes a case for its immediate amendment. The following are some key recommendations on the SCO Charter, based on a comparison with the ASEAN Charter:

2.1 Preamble

The Preamble to the SCO Charter must include the names of all the current members – permanent and those on observer status. Currently, it only has the names of the founding member states - China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In contrast, the preamble to the ASEAN Charter contains the names of all member states. However, unlike the SCO, there has been no change in the membership of ASEAN since the signing of its Charter in 2007.

2.2 Goals

The focus of the SCO Charter is limited to security and cooperation between member states. For India, which joined the SCO along with Pakistan, its connectivity and infrastructure projects are now equally significant and an important part of why India joined the SCO. India is heavily invested in the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor. Therefore, connectivity and infrastructure cooperation between the SCO members must be specifically included in the SCO charter as it is an important part of bilateral and plurilateral relationships between members.

In comparison, the goals of the ASEAN Charter are well defined and hold ASEAN as the primary regional body and perceive the ASEAN to be representative of the interests of all its member states. Leaning on the ASEAN Charter, the SCO Charter should consider including the following goals in its Charter as well:

1. *To maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and cooperation with its external partners in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive;*
2. *To strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN;*
3. *To create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment.*

2.3 Principles

A gaping hole in the SCO Charter's current set of principles³ is the absence of rule of law. Inclusion of rule of law as one of the principles under the Charter will ensure transparency, accountability and non-arbitrariness in the actions taken within the SCO framework and in actions taken by the member states.

The ASEAN Charter, on the other hand, mandates that its member states adhere to the principles of rule of law, good governance, democracy and of a constitutional government.⁴ These principles have been central to the ASEAN's progress in regional integration and economic development. The ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services and the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement are examples of the successful promotion of the rule of law in ASEAN.

2.4 Areas of cooperation:

Both ASEAN and SCO charters have lacunae in this dimension.

Within the SCO framework, the areas of cooperation exist, but are dated and not forward-looking. They do not enable the inclusion of the SCO's core issues such as cybersecurity, digital economy and cooperation during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic – all under the umbrella of 'security'.

The ASEAN Charter does not specifically list out the areas of cooperation. However, it has compensated by establishing various frameworks and mechanisms such as the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework, ASEAN Information and Communications Technology Masterplan 2020, Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for SME Development 2025, ASEAN COVID-19 Response Fund.

³ Under Article 2 of the SCO Charter. Available at <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/203013/>.

⁴ Article 2(2)(h), ASEAN Charter. Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

2.5 Decision-making:

The SCO Charter provides only for consensus-based decision making, limiting its flexibility.⁵ This makes the decision-making process rather complicated as the SCO comprises member states with contrasting political systems. Therefore, it is difficult to reach mutually beneficial solutions.⁶ This may in turn delay the entire decision-making process, and also its subsequent implementation.

The ASEAN is a step ahead of the SCO in this respect. It permits the ASEAN Summit⁷, the supreme policy-making body of the ASEAN comprising of heads of all member states, to take decisions in case consensus cannot be reached or when there is a serious breach of the Charter. However, the ASEAN Summit is a political body and a deadlock may arise at its level too given the political interest of the Summit members.⁸ For example, in the Preah Vihear Temple territorial dispute between Thailand and Cambodia⁹, the ASEAN played an important but limited role in mediating between the two countries. This dispute was finally settled by the International Court of Justice.

Learning from the difficulties faced by the ASEAN, the SCO should establish a legal body (and not a political body) that can conduct dispute resolution on the basis of law, within the SCO framework itself.

2.6 Operational language:

The SCO Charter prescribes Chinese and Russian as its official languages.¹⁰ While this may superficially seem like a minor point, it is a matter of concern to the two new member states, India and Pakistan which do not have fluency in either of these languages.

The ASEAN Charter is more practical in recognising English as its working language¹¹ as it is common between its member states, and allows for a more inclusive regional integration, including allowing for experts from other institutions to contribute when needed.

2.7 Dispute resolution

The key to all functioning societies, economies and multilateral bodies is dispute resolution. ASEAN recognised it early, and its charter details a procedure for dispute resolution which includes arbitration or other international legal instruments.

⁵ Article 16, SCO Charter. Available at <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/203013/>

⁶ Alimov, Rashid. *The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its role and place in the development of Eurasia*, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, volume 9, Issue 2, July 2018. Available at <https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/>

⁷ Article 20, ASEAN Charter. Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328214049_The_Deadlock_of_ASEAN_Dispute_Settlement_Mechanisms_and_Why_ASEAN_Cannot_Unlock_It

⁹ <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/WalterWoon-Dispute-Settlement-the-ASEAN-Way-2012.pdf>

¹⁰ Article 20, SCO Charter. Available at <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/203013/>.

¹¹ Article 34, ASEAN Charter. Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

The dispute resolution clause of the SCO Charter has the following loopholes:

- It does not contain a proper procedure for dispute resolution. It merely provides for two ways for resolution; consultation and negotiation, that too only in case of any dispute with respect to the interpretation or application of the SCO Charter;
- It does not provide a procedure for how the consultation will take place;
- It does not account for any form of dispute other than on interpretation or application of the SCO Charter;
- There is no method assigned for dispute resolution if a particular dispute is not resolved either through consultation or negotiation.

These are glaring lacunae as member states such as India-Pakistan and India-China have continuing bilateral territorial and trade differences.

Amending the SCO Charter to include various kinds of disputes and provide the option to members to resort to arbitration or other modes of peaceful settlement under the UN Charter,¹² or any other international legal instrument, is necessary. It may also consider the establishment of a quasi-judicial body/mechanism within the SCO for settlement of disputes.

2.8 Sectoral and National level bodies

The ASEAN Charter provides for:

- Establishment of sectoral Ministerial Bodies which shall ensure the implementation of decisions and initiatives and enhance cooperation in their concerned sector like trade, agriculture, science and technology and so on.¹³
- ASEAN National Secretariats have been established under the Charter in each member state to coordinate and ensure implementation of the ASEAN decisions at the domestic level.¹⁴

Similar to the ASEAN sectoral bodies, in pursuance of the goals of the SCO, the SCO established the SCO Energy Club, SCO Youth Council, SCO Business Council and SCO Interbank Consortium. However, these are not recognised under its charter. These entities/bodies should be formally recognised under the Charter in order to ensure effective monitoring and implementation of the initiatives under the SCO framework.

While the SCO Charter provides for the establishment of the Council for National Coordinators¹⁵ for coordinating meetings, its mandate does not include facilitating and monitoring the implementation of obligations at the national level in each member state, and, coordinating

¹² Article 33(1), UN Charter: *The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice.* Available at <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>

¹³ Article 10, ASEAN Charter. Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

¹⁴ Article 13, ASEAN Charter. Available at <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/archive/publications/ASEAN-Charter.pdf>

¹⁵ Article 9, SCO Charter. Available at <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/203013/>.

activities of the SCO at the national level. The SCO Charter should either add these functions to the mandate of the Council, or in the alternative, provide for the establishment of national-level bodies in each member state of the SCO. This will enable smooth coordination between the SCO Secretariat and the member states, along with effective implementation and monitoring of the SCO decisions at the national level in each member state.

3. Conclusion

India has much at stake in the SCO and should take the initiative to insert itself deeper and more assertively in the institution. In addition to the crucial Charter amendments as detailed hereinabove, India should make every effort to be a part of the SCO Interbank Consortium, a joint financing platform in the grouping which is responsible for making investment decisions and providing funding for projects.

With India's renewed focus on the Connect Central Asia Policy, a broad-based approach including political, security, economic and cultural connections,¹⁶ India has furthered the impetus to focus on connectivity agreements with the Central Asian countries which will also serve as a corollary to China's BRI projects in the region. India's aim of improving connectivity ties with the Central Asian countries will receive further stimulus once countries such as Afghanistan and Iran, currently on observer status, join the SCO. This will also help the SCO become more multipolar in nature instead of being dominated by Russia and China, while also creating a level-playing field amongst its members.

India has been a bystander in the Eurasian and Central Asian theatres. It is only now beginning to understand the urgency of being a relevant and reliable actor in the region. Once its economy is stimulated and self-reliant, India should begin to sign equitable trade agreements with its near regionals as it will need more export markets. Central Asia is one such market. The relationship India builds with Central Asia, through the SCO, can lead to an equitable trade agreement with Central Asian countries in the future. The interest exists - in 2015, a Joint Study Group was formed to consider the feasibility of a free trade agreement between the Republic of India and the Member States of the Eurasian Economic Union;¹⁷ this has not yet been realised. Now is the time to update and expand the scope of this study, along with an action plan.

The skirmishes amongst the India-Pakistan-China troika should not be a dampener for India's expanded role in the SCO. In fact, it is even more critical for India to deepen its engagement with the SCO to ensure that the region stays free from hegemony.

¹⁶ Ministry of External Affairs, 'Keynote address by MOS Shri E. Ahamed at First India-Central Asia Dialogue', Government of India, 12 June, 2012 <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/19791/>

¹⁷ Ministry of External Affairs, 'Joint Statement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of India: Shared Trust, New Horizons (December 24, 2015)', Government of India, 24 Decemeber 2015, <https://mea.gov.in/outoging-visit-detail.htm?26243/Joint+St+atement+between+the+Russian+Federation+and+the+Republic+of+India+Shared+Trust+New+Horizons+December+24+2015>

India and the SCO: Bound by Buddhism

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In November this year, India will be hosting the Shanghai Cooperation Council (SCO) exhibition "Shared Buddhist Heritage" to coincide with the SCO Council of Heads of Government Meeting and two Ministerial Level Meetings. This paper recommends a theme on India's Buddhist legacy in the SCO, which ties together three important Buddhist historical narratives (based on archaeological evidence), that can add heft to India's leadership in reviving people-to-people ties through Buddhism amongst the eight member nations

The Shanghai Cooperation Council's (SCO) member countries – India, Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan – are bound together by Buddhism's two-millennia-old religious and cultural legacy. In China, India and Russia, Buddhists make up a significant minority of the population (See Appendix 1¹). Even among the Muslim majority Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Pakistan, there is a residual Buddhist presence and a strong cultural legacy through the influence of the Graeco-Buddhist² Gandhara School of Art on the artistic traditions and architecture in these regions.

The history of this living religious and cultural legacy, when combined with Buddhism's outsized archaeological imprint in the SCO region, is seen in the hundreds of monastic grottoes, stupas, and temples. Many of these are UNESCO world heritage sites and make both the contemporary and archaeological, together, a compelling narrative for India's soft diplomacy outreach in the SCO.

This can work because of India's centrality to Buddhist history in the numerous oasis towns and fortified cities that mark the ancient Eurasian caravan trade routes — also known as the Old Silk Route. India's importance lies not just in it being the Buddhist Holy Land *but in its role of introducing Buddhism across the region of the SCO and then continuously disseminating new ideas into this network* for circulation, assimilation and, at times, transformation.

The Buddhist temple in Elista, the capital city of the Republic of Kalmykia, Russia, is considered the largest Buddhist temple in Europe. The present culture of Kalmykia is closely connected with that of the Kalmyk people – the only people in Europe traditionally professing Buddhism.



An outstanding example of this process is the spread of Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism (based on the concept of 'mindfulness' or Dhyana) founded in India, which became the foundation for Chan (Chinese), Zen (Japanese) and Tibetan Buddhism. In turn it is largely Tibetan Buddhism that travelled into Russian provinces bordering Mongolia³ – Buryatia, Zabaykalsky Krai and Tuva — and the only European region where Buddhism is practiced by a majority of people, Russia's Republic of Kalmykia.⁴ Often, it is the reframing of original Indian beliefs and knowledge into locally acceptable idioms that popularised Indian Buddhist beliefs abroad. This ability of the Buddhist faith to assimilate foreign cultural influences and local beliefs was enabled by the development of Mahayana Buddhism – a school of Buddhism that contrasted sharply with the older, austere Hinayana one. It also permitted representation of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas⁵ in human form. The early development of Mahayana Buddhism in the 1st century CE coincided with the flowering of the Gandhara and the Mathura schools of art in the Indian subcontinent, under the patronage of the great Kushan king, Kanishka. It was Mahayana Buddhism that spread across the SCO region.

Ruins of the ancient Buddhist University of Nalanda in Bihar state, India



India's influence in this region is, therefore, visible everywhere. It is visible on the gravestones of numerous Indian monks⁶ who dedicated themselves to the development of Buddhist institutions in Central and East Asia. It is visible in the popular Indian Buddhist iconography – the Jataka tales and the Avadana or cause-effect stories that dominate Buddhist art – across its religious sites. It is manifest in the vast influence of the world-renowned Buddhist University⁷ – Nalanda – which was active from the 5th to 13th century and hosted the famous Chinese monks Xuanzang (Hiuen Tsang) and Yijin (I-Tsing), among many other foreign students.

Given this vast, complex, and nuanced historical, geographical, multi-ethnic, and cultural canvas of Buddhism in the SCO region, India's soft diplomacy outreach through the "Shared Buddhist Heritage" virtual exhibition in November should focus on three connected narratives:

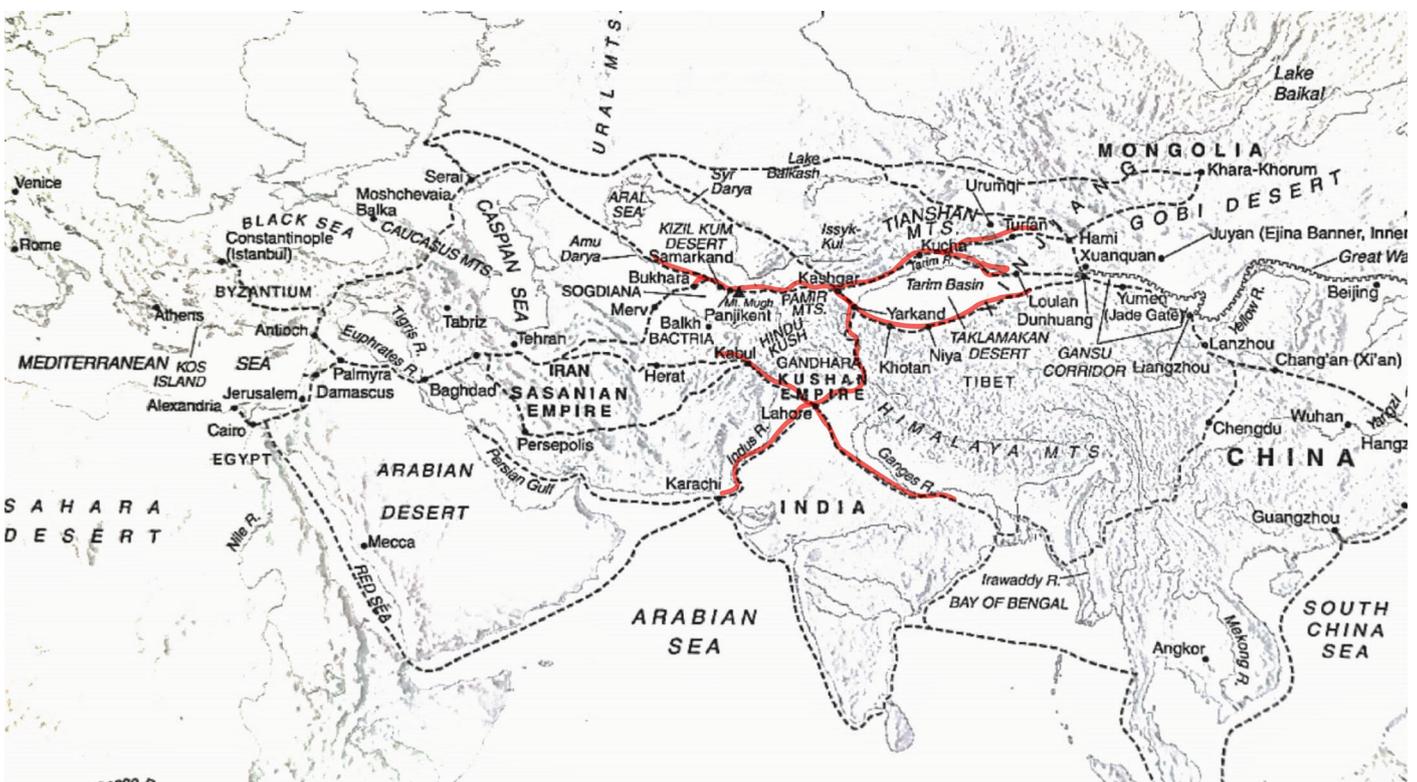
1. The circulation of Indian Buddhist religious and cultural knowledge through Buddhist Kingdoms, oasis polities, Buddhist monks, monasteries, and temples across SCO nations.
2. The transmission of secular technical knowledge from the Indian subcontinent – like traditional medicine (Indian Aayush), manufacturing and astro-sciences – into these countries through Buddhist channels.⁸
3. Tracing back Buddhism's living legacy and its archaeological sites across the SCO nations, to its roots in the Indian subcontinent. This will tie-up the narrative nicely to Buddhism's holy sites in India, all of which are part of the Indian government's Buddhist Circuit.⁹

1. Circulation

During the lifetime of the Buddha (sometime between 4 to 6 BCE), the religion that he founded was confined to the region of the eastern Gangetic plains, where it co-existed with Jainism and early Hinduism. This is where the core beliefs of the faith were enunciated by the Buddha.

Buddhist monks then were itinerant travelers, spreading their faith dutifully by ceaselessly moving from place to place. The actual work of writing down the Buddha's sermons (Sutras) by his disciples took place almost a century after the Buddha's death, and was contemporaneous with the early beginnings of monastic Buddhism in India.¹⁰

A detailed Map of the Eurasian trade routes during the 1st to 2nd century CE. The Kushan emperors controlled the key crossroads (central section) of the Eurasian trade roads as marked in red.



Map courtesy: Oxford University Press-Academic (UK/USA). Taken from Valerie Hansen's 'The Silk Road: A New History with Documents' (2017)

The story of Indian Buddhism in the SCO region begins in the first century CE¹¹ – a period that coincides with a vigorous intra-regional caravan trade¹² made possible by four powerful contemporaneous empires. One of these, the Kushan Empire in the Indian subcontinent under Emperor Kanishka (r. 78-101 CE)¹³ controlled a strategic segment (see map) of the Eurasian caravan network – the southern and central Asian roads. Notably, his territories in Central Asia covered southern Uzbekistan (Termez is a key Buddhist site) and Tajikistan – regions crossed by the Amu Darya River – and continued

eastward to key oasis towns like Kashgar, Khotan, Yarkhand and Niya in today's Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China. Kanishka's contemporaries in keeping the caravan routes secure were the Early Han in Inner China and the Parthian Empire (a Persian dynasty).¹⁴ In the west, it was anchored by the ancient Roman Empire (1st to 4th CE). These empires also controlled smaller tributary polities along the routes ensuring the smooth transit of goods, making the first and second centuries CE the golden era of Eurasian trade.

Though active dissemination of Buddhism in the SCO region only began under Emperor Kanishka, it had already made an inroad into the former East Turkistan oasis town Khotan (see map) – deemed Indian in its early history – soon after or during the reign of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka (r. 269-232 BCE). A fact that is little known is¹⁵ Khotan (in today's Xinjiang, China) was founded by Ashoka's son, and it was Ashoka's grandson who introduced Buddhism as a state religion in Khotan. Khotan even as late as the 7th century, was described by Xuangzang as a predominantly Indian settlement with a strong Buddhist presence.

Emperor Ashoka's reign was also a period of great development and consolidation of Buddhist teachings, its monastic codes and its folk tales. According to Historian Tansen Sen in his article 'The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuangzang, and Yijing', Buddhism first travelled into Central Asia sometime either during or after Mauryan Emperor Ashoka's reign, the first major historical figure to convert to Buddhism. It is acknowledged that not only did Ashoka send missionaries across his vast kingdom and abroad (Sri Lanka, South East Asia) to propagate his new faith, but that the Ashokan stone engraved edicts are also the earliest known Buddhist texts in the world.

These early forays by Indian Buddhism into Central Asia were given a major fillip during the rule of the Kushan Emperor Kanishka and his son Huvishka. Kanishka became an active and liberal patron of Buddhism in his kingdom. This is evident from the fact that he convened the fourth Buddhist council in Kashmir (part of his kingdom) to settle disputed questions of Buddhist faith and practice.

Stupa at Fayaz Tepe Buddhist archaeological site in Termez, Uzbekistan.



The vigorous dissemination and popularity of Buddhism in Central Asia was effected through territorial expansion into this region by Kanishka. He established his suzerainty over small oasis kingdoms like Khotan, Kashgar and Yarkand – by leading his army over the Pamir mountains.¹⁶ His control of this strategic crossroads between the Indian subcontinent, Central Asian kingdoms (Parthia, Bactria) and Han China, relayed Buddhism across – what is today – the SCO region.

2. Transmission

The caravan trade not only carried goods, merchants and emissaries, but also Indian, Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist monks and pilgrims. A sizeable number of these sojourners who settled down at their destinations or at monasteries mid-point, never returning home – were also carriers of knowledge of Indian medicine, astrology, astronomy and even manufacturing. This assumes importance as monasteries offered not just lodgings for travelers but also medical help much of it drawn from traditional Indian medicine (Ayurveda and Yoga).

Nanda the cowherd in a fresco from the Kizil Caves near Kucha. Kucha was the hometown of the famous monk-translator Kumarajiva and it is believed that some of the early frescoes in the Kizil Caves were painted by Kumarajiva's father.



2.1 Trade

By the time the first known Han envoy Zhang Qian (d.113 BCE) was sent on a mission into Central Asia¹⁷ he discovered that Chinese cloth and bamboo were sold as far west in the markets of Samarkand and Bukhara (in today's Uzbekistan),¹⁸ having made their way there via India (Shendu).¹⁹

Although Zhang Qian was sent on a subsequent mission into Central Asia by the Early Han Emperor Wu (r.140-87 BCE), his knowledge of Shendu and her people was gathered in the bazaars of Central Asian oasis towns. In these ancient times Central Asian bazaars and her merchants were the interface between South and East Asia. Indian trade with Central Asia was active. Parthians, Sogdians, merchants from Bactria, Yuezhi horse traders from the Fergana Valley (a region mainly in eastern Uzbekistan and partly in adjoining Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan), and even Chinese merchants, all interacted with their Indian counterparts — like the Kashmiri traders from the Subcontinent's north — in Central Asian oasis towns.²⁰

2.2 Art

Parallel to its dissemination into Central Asia in the 1st century CE, Indian Buddhism's artistic imprint through Gandharan Buddhist art was carried along the meandering networks of Eurasian trade. The Indian influence is evident everywhere – in the architecture and layout of the cave temples, the style of drawing and painting of *Jataka* and *Avadana* themed frescos, the rock cut sculptures, and even in the rituals used, like circumambulating around a *stupa*.²¹ This is probably because most of these Buddhist institutions were founded and steered in their early years by Indian monks. This influence was particularly strong in towns that were once considered Indian culturally. Oasis kingdoms like Kucha – home to the exquisite Kizil Buddhist Caves – Niya, Agnidesa (Karashahr), Torpan (Gaochang) and Aksu (Bharuka), were all once part of East Turkistan, today China's Autonomous Region of Xinjiang.

A 9th C fresco showing a Caucasian Central Asian monk (left) teaching an East Asian monk (right). This fresco is from the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves near Turfan, Xinjiang, China.



2.3 Institutions

The development of Buddhist institutions in these oasis market towns resulted in many Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist monks opting to study at Kucha or at Khotan. The latter housed a famous Buddhist college or Vihara. Both towns already had a sizeable population of Indian Buddhist monks and teachers, so rather than undertaking the arduous journey into the Buddhist heartland in North India, they preferred studying closer to home. These Central Asian oasis polities helped transmit the Buddhist canon and its associated literature, into Inner China (broadly the Han Chinese homeland) in the 2nd century CE. Various Chinese dynasties adopted Buddhism – in addition to existing beliefs in Daoism, Confucianism and local folk beliefs. This kind of syncretism between Buddhism and other competing faiths (Zoroastrianism, Nestorian Christianity, Manichaeism) and local beliefs, is also evident in archaeological sites across the Central Asian republics (including the four SCO ones) till the advent of Islam in this region from the 9th century onwards.

2.4 Technology and more

The Indian technology of making crystallised sugar by boiling cane juice, was shared with monks accompanying a Tang mission to King Harsha's court, subsequent to Xuanzang's return to China in 644 CE.²²

Other valuable secular knowledge transmitted through Buddhist monks into the SCO region and translated by Central Asian and Chinese monks were Indian treatises on medicine²³ – especially those of Jivaka and Nagarjuna, who wrote on ophthalmology -- astrology, astronomy, mathematics, and calendar-making

3. Living & Cultural Legacies

State support was key throughout Buddhism's history in popularising it both in India and across the SCO region. But even more critical to its acceptance abroad was the agency of teams of translators and charismatic Indian, Central Asian and Chinese Buddhist monks, who made its religious and secular knowledge accessible to king and commoner alike.

One way of tying together the three narratives of Circulation, Transmission and the Living & Cultural Legacies of Buddhism in the SCO region to its country of origin – India – is through the fascinating centuries-old history of translation of Buddhist texts from their original Sanskrit written in Brahmi and Pali scripts, into the Central Asian languages (like Khotanese) and Chinese.

The earliest translations of the Buddhist canon were undertaken by teams of Central Asian monks. Their works were full of inaccuracies. Therefore, the first truly popular – and still used – translations were those of the multi-lingual Kumarajiva²⁴ (344 to 413 CE), a native of the oasis kingdom of Kucha, whose parents hailed from Gandhara (today in north western Pakistan). Kumarajiva was not only a polyglot but also steeped in the knowledge of the Hindu Vedas, occult sciences, astronomy, and the canons of both branches of Buddhism – Hinayana and Mahayana. Kucha then had a strong South Asian presence and influence. Kumarajiva was summoned to the Chinese Court in 401 CE, expressly for the purpose of translating Buddhist manuscripts from their original Sanskrit into Chinese, including the famous Lotus Sutra. His success in translating 300 manuscripts (with his team) effectively opened the doors of China to Buddhist teachings.

Kumarajiva's efforts were taken forward two centuries later, when the Chinese monk Xuanzang travelled to India – from 629-644 CE -- using the overland Central Asian route. The purpose of Xuanzang's pilgrimage, was to study Sanskrit to translate Buddhism's original manuscripts into Chinese, especially its monastic rules. Xuanzang studied at the ancient Nalanda Buddhist University in India for eleven years, and on his return home carried back with him 657 Buddhist texts, which he and his team of scholars meticulously translated into Chinese.²⁵ Notably, Xuanzang was a self-appointed monk-diplomat who had not been permitted to leave China. He reasoned that if he could meet with important rulers enroute and report back to the Tang Emperor Taizong (r. 626-649 CE) when he returned, he would be forgiven. The most important bilateral relation he established for the Tang court was with King Harsha's (r. 606-647 CE) kingdom in the northern Gangetic plains.²⁶

4. Recommendations

As the most influential years of Buddhism in the SCO region were undoubtedly the 1st to the 7th centuries (Kanishka's empire to King Harsha's kingdom) the focus of the forthcoming Shared Buddhist Heritage Exhibition should only be on these seven hundred years. This should be done by tracing back to the Indian subcontinent the Circulations, Transformations and ways in which Indian Buddhist beliefs and even secular knowledge were assimilated. The idea of common cultural roots between peoples from these eight nations should be the bedrock of any future planned institutions, like the proposed SCO University.

In developing this idea of a Shared Buddhist Heritage further, some concrete suggestions are:

- Exchanges on traditional Indian Aayush, which is of great interest to the CARs.
- Student exchanges for the study of Sanskrit and its ancient scripts; research on the history and practice of ancient Buddhist art, architecture and religion; the study of traditional medicine and science; classical literature and the art of translation. The nodal agency for this could be the new Nalanda University.
- Greater awareness and pride among the predominantly Muslim locals in the CAR member nations, in the archaeological and cultural legacy of Buddhism in their region (like the restoration of the Fayaz Tepe Buddhist monastery in Termez, Uzbekistan) bodes well for India's soft diplomacy outreach. This can be leveraged by a combination of project finance and knowledge inputs – like historians, archaeologists, project managers, conservationists and curators for on-site museums.
- A focus on Buddhist tourism by developing a narrative of linkages as suggested in this paper.

Endnotes

1. Appendix 1: Buddhist Population in the seven SCO member countries

COUNTRY	POPULATION
India	9.75 million approx..
Pakistan	20,000 approx.
Russia	1.5 million approx..
Uzbekistan	27,780
Tajikistan	7,076
Kyrgystan	18,610
Kazakhstan	81,843
China	244 million approx..

Source: Pews Research & Worldpopulationreview.com

2. The term Graeco-Buddhist is used to describe the Gandhara School of Art to highlight the strong Hellenistic artistic style that was used on Buddhist subjects, whether in paintings or rock sculptures. It was this style that traversed and was modified by local artistic traditions in the SCO region. The Graeco-Buddhist also had elements of Indian and Persian influences. In terms of periodization, its artists drew inspiration from the art of Roman Empire in Asia Minor, which had its roots in classical Greek art. Contemporaneous to the Gandhara School was the equally important Mathura School of art, which was also patronised by Kushan emperors, in particular Kanishka and Huvishka. Mathura was territorially within the Kushan Empire.
3. Buddhism first entered Russia in the 7th CE through its easternmost region – the Kingdom of Balhae that existed from 698 to 926 CE. It spread into adjoining regions of Russia that are geographically and culturally adjacent to Mongolia and inhabited by Mongolian ethnic groups. Buddhism reached this region through China. In the case of Kalmykia, it came through Kazakhstan.
4. The Kalmyks took their religion – Buddhism—with them when they left the eastern and south eastern regions of Kazakhstan. They formed the Republic of Kalmykia on the Caspian Sea, the only European region in the world where the majority of the population (about 95%) are Buddhists.
5. In early Indian Buddhism and in some later traditions—including Theravada, at present the major form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka and other parts of Southeast Asia—the term bodhisattva was used primarily to refer to the Buddha Shakyamuni (as Gautama Siddhartha is known) in his former lives. The stories of his lives, the Jatakas, portray the efforts of the bodhisattva to cultivate the qualities, including morality, self-sacrifice, and wisdom, which will define him as a buddha. Later, and especially in the Mahayana tradition—the major form of Buddhism in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan—it was thought that anyone who made the aspiration to awakening (bodhicittotpada)—vowing, often in a communal ritual context, to become a buddha—is therefore a bodhisattva. For more details:<https://www.britannica.com/topic/bodhisattva>
6. Most Buddhist temples and monasteries have gravestones within or close to the Complex, like that of Huili, the Indian monk who founded the famous Lingyin Buddhist monastic and temple complex in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, China. Huili’s grave lies at the entry gate of this famous temple-monastic complex, indicating that Indian monks, who were priests or religious scholars had settled there and made important contributions to the development of Buddhism in the region.

7. The Government of India's Ministry of Tourism, state governments of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, along with the private sector and various Buddhist monasteries and sects participated in an International Finance Corporation (World Bank) project report (2014-2018) on the holistic development of the Buddhist Circuit. The key highlights of the Circuit are: Lumbini in Nepal (Buddha's birthplace), Bodhgaya in Bihar (where he attained enlightenment), Sarnath in UP (delivered his first sermon), Nalanda and Rajgir (where he lived and taught), Kushinagar in UP (where he died), Kapilavastu on the Indo-Nepal border (early years), Vaishali in Bihar (where the Buddha delivered his last lecture), Sravasti in UP (where Buddha spent 24 rainy seasons at the Jetavan monastery), and Kausambi in UP (where he lived and preached). See <https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/2bdd4697-6d7f-4f78-bca0-269aa100b25a/Buddhist+Circuit+Tourism+Strategy+Final.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=kC1uny1>
8. When referring to ancient India one is referring to the geographical region of the Indian subcontinent (which includes Pakistan a member nation of the SCO). Also, the ongoing Chinese attempt to Sinicize the Buddhist narrative not just in the Maritime Belt & Road Initiative countries – like Sri Lanka-- but also in Himalayan border monasteries in the Indian Union Territory of Leh and the State of Arunachal Pradesh (see <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/china-targets-indias-ladakh/>) does not take away from the fact that India was the lodestone for all things Buddhist from the first till the 12th century CE. Himalayan Buddhism took root among the various tribes of this region from the 7th century CE, and the transmission was from the Subcontinent.
9. The IRCTC runs special 'Buddhist Circuit' trains for tourists and Buddhist pilgrims. See endnote (iii) above.
10. The Code of Conduct for a monastic life – one of the three Tripikas (Baskets) of the Buddhist religion -- is important, as the two most famous Chinese Buddhist monks who travelled to India by the overland route through Central Asia – Faxian (tr. 395 to 414 CE) and Xuanzang (tr. 629 to 644 CE) -- wanted to carry home not just original manuscripts of Buddhist Sutras but authentic monastic rules, which they could translate into Chinese. This was to dispense with earlier Central Asian translations that had then been translated to Chinese and were discovered to be inaccurate. This indicates the importance of Central Asia to the transmission of Buddhism.
11. The abbreviation CE stands for Common Era and BCE is Before the Common Era.
12. For a more details on the old land-based caravan routes read Gateway House article <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/interweaving-the-old-cotton-and-silk-routes/>
13. The dating of the Kushan kings has not been determined. The year 78 CE is taken as the first year of Kanishka's reign as the Shaka Era is believed to begin with the first year of his reign BUT it is speculated that he could have ascended the throne anytime between 78 and 144 CE. See: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Kaniska>
14. Ancient Parthia is the territory lying south east of the Caspian Sea. It was founded about 248 BCE by Arsakes – hence known as the Arsakidian dynasty of Persia – and lasted till 226 CE, when it was overthrown by the Sassanian dynasty. The Kingdoms of Parthia and Bactria broke away at about the same time from the Hellenistic Seleukidian Empire, founded by Nikator Seleukos.
15. According to tradition, Emperor Ashoka's son founded the oasis kingdom of Khotan (in today's Xinjiang Province in China), and whose grandson made Buddhism Khotan's state religion. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Buddhism/Central-Asia-and-China#ref888583> (Accessed on 10 August 2020). Also, Tansen Sen, The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing: Sources for cross-cultural encounters between ancient China and ancient India, Volume 11 No.3, Education About Asia, Winter 2006, p.26.

16. Spear Percival, Edited, *The Oxford History of India: By The Late Vincent A. Smith* (Delhi, OUP, 1981), p. 149.
17. Zhang Qian was sent by the Early Han Emperor Wu to win the support of the Yuezhi tribes of the Fergana Valley (in modern day Uzbekistan) against its enemy -- the northern Xiongnu. Zhang Xian's missions to Central Asia are celebrated by China by making him a narrative figure central to all Silk Route tourist sites developed by them.
18. Samarkand and Bukhara then were oasis towns in ancient Bactria, a kingdom that approximates to northern Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan.
19. This is the first ever reference to India and the north east route, which connects Early Han China (206 BCE to 220 CE) with North India (specifically the eastern Indo Gangetic plains) through today's Yunnan and Sichuan provinces. It is noteworthy that this region was where Buddhism thrived in India.
20. At the Museum in Niya (once an oasis town on the southern bifurcation of the Silk Route around the Taklamakan Desert) are displayed archaeological finds of preserved Chinese dumplings and the North Indian flatbread Naan. Hansen, Valerie, *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents* (New York, OUP-Academic,2017), p.9.
21. Circumambulating around a Buddhist stupa, whether in a Chaitya hall or an external one has its roots in India. This ritual is also common to Hinduism. Sen, Tansen, *India, China and the World: A Connected History* (USA, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), p. 99.
22. This transmission of sugar-making from South Asia to Tang China is noted in a document in the Silk Route town of Dunhuang, which also suggests that the knowledge gained had an impact on sugarcane cultivation in China.
23. During the powerful Tang and Sui dynasties, Indian physicians (longevity drugs were in great demand!), mathematician-astronomers to predict the lunar and solar eclipse, astrologers, calendar-makers, were procured from India and employed by the royal courts. An influential figure who served several Tang rulers was the South Asian Tantric monk Amoghavajra, an astrologer, a translator of Sanskrit works and the author of several books on horoscopic astrology. For more information: Sen, Tansen, *India, China and the World: A Connected History*(USA, Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp 82-89.
24. Kumarajiva was an unusually talented linguist with a command over not just Sanskrit, Chinese and the local Kuchean, but a range of Silk Route languages ranging from Kharosthi, Gandhari, Sogdian to Agnean. Hansen, Valerie, *The Silk Road: A New History with Documents* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2017), pp 94-95.
25. Today, these manuscripts are stored at the Great Wild Goose Pagoda in Xian, which was expressly built for this purpose by the Tang Emperor. Tansen Sen, *The Travel Records of Chinese Pilgrims Faxian, Xuanzang, and Yijing: Sources for cross-cultural encounters between ancient China and ancient India*, Volume 11 No.3, *Education About Asia*, Winter 2006, p.29.
26. The Chinese monk Xuanzang also penned a detailed travelogue of all the towns he visited along the Silk Route, while on his way to the Indian Subcontinent. His 'The Records of the Western Regions' is even today a source book for historians and archaeologists.

