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Chinese Media Representation of the SCO: A Study of *People's Daily* and *Global Times*

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Abstract. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is one of the first international organizations in which the PRC played a key role. However, according to some researchers, over the past 20 years the Chinese leadership's interest in this mechanism of international cooperation has decreased. This article explores the place of the SCO in Chinese foreign policy by analyzing the representation of this organization in the PRC's media — Chinese-language publications in the newspapers *People's Daily* and *Global Times*, which both belong to the Chinese Communist Party. Such focus allows better understanding the value of the SCO to China and its position vis-à-vis other Chinese initiatives in Central Asia. The authors use methods of quantitative and qualitative content analysis, namely counting the frequency of single words, identifying and counting the most common frames, and discussing the ways these frames are constructed. Frame analysis demonstrates that the articles focus on the achievements of the SCO in solving regional problems, while existing difficulties are ignored. The SCO is represented as an important element of China's foreign policy, along with the Belt and Road Initiative, while the details of their interaction are not discussed. It should also be mentioned that the SCO is framed as an association of countries opposing Western hegemonism and advocating a new system of international relations. An extremely positive representation of the SCO serves legitimation of the political regime in the PRC: the articles focus on China's role as a leader in the SCO and its successes in addressing domestic problems, such as poverty reduction and fighting the coronavirus infection. This narrative is often created by quoting the opinions of high-level foreign politicians and average citizens.

Key words: the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SCO, China's foreign policy, Central Asia, Chinese media

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ШОС через призму китайских СМИ: анализ публикаций в «Жэньминь Жибао» и «Хуаньцю Шибao»

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Аннотация. Шанхайская организация сотрудничества (ШОС) является одной из первых международных организаций, в создании которых ключевую роль сыграла Китайская Народная Республика (КНР). Однако, по мнению некоторых исследователей, за прошедшие 20 лет заинтересованность китайского руководства в этом механизме международного сотрудничества снизилась. Оценивается роль ШОС во внешней политике КНР через анализ репрезентации этой организации в СМИ КНР, а именно в публикациях на китайском языке в газетах «Жэньминь Жибао» и «Хуаньцю Шибao». Изучение репрезентации ШОС в СМИ КНР помогает лучше понять, в чем заключается ценность этой организации для КНР на настоящий момент и как ШОС соотносится с другими китайскими проектами в Центральной Азии. Анализ статей проводился при помощи количественного и качественного контент-анализа: авторы измерили частотность отдельных слов, выделили и подсчитали фреймы, подробно разобрали отдельные примеры их использования. В ходе фрейм-анализа были получены следующие результаты. В фокус статей попадают достижения ШОС в вопросах решения региональных проблем, а сложности сотрудничества не освещаются. ШОС позиционируется как важный элемент внешней политики КНР наряду с инициативой «Пояс и путь», однако детали их взаимодействия не обсуждаются. Организация фреймируется как объединение стран, противостоящих западному гегемонизму и выступающих за обновление системы международных отношений. Представляется, что исключительно положительное освещение ШОС связано с попыткой легитимации политического режима КНР: в статьях делается акцент как на лидерстве КНР в рамках ШОС, так и на успехах Китая в решении внутренних проблем, таких как бедность и распространение коронавирусной инфекции. Следует отметить, что в изученных нами публикациях о заслугах КНР часто говорят иностранцы — как политические деятели, так и простые граждане.

Ключевые слова: Шанхайская организация сотрудничества, ШОС, внешняя политика КНР, Центральная Азия, СМИ КНР

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Introduction

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is one of the first international organizations in which the PRC played a key role. At the time when the organization was established, the officially declared goals of the SCO were “strengthening mutual trust in the defense sphere, ensuring peace, safety, and stability in the region, fighting against

terrorism, separatism, and extremism.”¹ Over time, the scope of cooperation within the SCO has expanded and now includes projects in

¹ The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) // Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. (In Russian). URL: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/directions/vneshneekonomicheskaya_deyatelnost/mnogostoronnee_ekonomicheskoe_sotrudnichestvo/shanhayskaya_organizaciya_sotrudnichestva_shos/ (accessed: 14.12.2021).

economic development, energy, education, etc. Researchers note that for the PRC, the establishment of the organization was crucial to maintain safety and stability in regions bordering Central Asia and to create the basis for a coordinated fight against three forces of evil: ethnic separatism, religious extremism, and international terrorism (Chung, 2004, pp. 994—996; Cabestan, 2013, p. 425). Zhao Huasheng (2013) adds that energy cooperation within the SCO is a second priority for the PRC. Another common view is that the establishment of the SCO helped the PRC spread its influence in Central Asia while keeping good relations with the Russian Federation (Soboleva & Krivohizh, 2020, p. 129). Thus, for the PRC, the SCO has become an important tool for promoting its interests in the region.

However, according to some researchers, Chinese leaders' interest in the SCO has decreased over the last 20 years for a number of reasons. Firstly, in the 2000s the PRC failed to realize a number of economic initiatives, such as a free-trade zone or the SCO Development bank (Hooijmaaijers, 2021). Secondly, the enlargement of the SCO, which is often considered to be an important step in the development of the organization, has complicated the decision-making process within the organization. Thirdly, over the last 20 years the role of the PRC has become more prominent in the international arena, contributing to Beijing's involvement in global governance (Cooper & Zhang, 2017). I.E. Denisov (2015) points out that "dissatisfaction with the current state of the SCO" was reflected in the creation of the Silk Road Economic Belt. Although researchers note that the PRC's interest towards the SCO has decreased, Chinese leaders officially continue to emphasize the importance of the SCO for China's foreign policy.² Therefore, it is

interesting to study the representation of the SCO in the PRC's media, as it may help understand how the PRC explains the importance of the SCO to the Chinese audience and how the SCO is correlated with other Chinese projects in Central Asia.

In this study, the representation of the SCO is analyzed from the perspective of the news domestication theory. Our data set is composed of publications from Chinese-language newspapers such as *People's Daily* and *Global Times* from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2021. The choice of the time frame is based on the authors' intent to get the latest data on the representation of the organization in the media and, at the same time, to acquire sufficient data for the research. The analysis of articles is based on methods of quantitative and qualitative content analysis: the authors classify articles by topic, count the frequency of certain words, identify and count frames, and analyze their usage. Based on the acquired data, conclusions are made about the image of the SCO in the PRC and its importance for Beijing.

Data and Methods

Usually, when international news is covered in national media, it undergoes the process of domestication. The primary goal of domestication is to make the information more attractive and coherent for the audience and to present it according to the dominant national ideology or its specific cultural features (Clausen, 2004). News domestication can be achieved in several ways: appealing to readers' emotions, providing stories or interviews with fellow citizens, discussing their achievements, and linking events in other countries to domestic policy agenda (Alasuutari, Qadir & Creutz, 2013).

Aligning news to the national context is a common journalistic practice, but in countries where news agenda is shaped and controlled by the political elite, as in the PRC, the representation of international events reflects in

² Full text of Xi Jinping's speech at the 20th Meeting of the Member states of the SCO leaders // Xinhua News. November 10, 2020. (In Russian). URL: http://russian.news.cn/2020-11/10/c_139506870.htm (accessed: 14.12.2021).

the first place their take on important issues (Chen & Rowlands, 2022, p. 4). According to Press Freedom Index 2020, the PRC ranks 177th out of 180 countries;³ it is obvious that the media is an important tool which is used by the elites to form a certain narrative in the society (Wang, 2020).

In fact, interpreting international news in particular ways can be used as an instrument to legitimize the regime (Pak et al., 2020; Burnell, 2006). For instance, Holbig (2011) writes that in the PRC the news about international events is framed in such a way as to showcase the advantages and successes of the Chinese model.

In this study, we analyze the representation of the SCO in Chinese-language publications in the newspapers *People's Daily* and *Global Times*, using the theory of news domestication and the theory of regime legitimization. We have chosen these two papers, first of all, because they are both widely read. Additionally, the target audience, content, and, consequently, narrative of the two publications are different. *People's Daily* is one of the first newspapers in the PRC, and it is also the official print media and the mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party (Wu, 1994). *Global Times*, which is a functional unit of *People's Daily*, covers international affairs. Unlike *People's Daily*, its publications are often estimated by the researchers as having a strong nationalist connotation; however, senior executives insist that it promotes patriotism, not nationalism (Shirk, 2007). Thus, including both the media in our research will enable us to cover the diversity of the SCO's official narrative.

The newspaper articles were taken from the information database Factiva. We included articles from the Chinese-language *People's Daily* and *Global Times* that mentioned the SCO (上海合作组织 — Shanghai hezuo zuzhi; 上合 — Shanghe). Between January 1, 2019,

and December 31, 2021, more than 100 of such articles were published, but, as some of them were duplicates, only 95 of them were analyzed: 65 — from 2019, 20 — from 2020, and 10 — from 2021. It is worth mentioning that publications about the SCO are situational, most of them announce or describe certain past events.

The main research method used in the work was frame analysis. By framing, we understand organizing a news story according to the theme, style and facts such that to convey a particular idea (Entman, 1993). Analyzing frames helps to reveal general patterns of how a social phenomenon is presented and interpreted in the given society. We were interested in the SCO's framing and the role of the PRC in the SCO, specifically, revealing the most popular frames and individual cases when these interpretations were created. As a unit of analysis, we used a cohesive text fragment matching the meaning of the frames. We manually coded the texts for predefined frame categories, with each frame identified no more than once per article. Frame analysis was enhanced by qualitative content analysis. We counted how often different countries were mentioned in the texts and analyzed the context in which most frequent ones were mentioned.

Results

The first step of the analysis was to count the number of country mentions in our data sample. As for the PRC's partners within the SCO, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan are mentioned most frequently (Table 1). The large number of mentions of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is explained by the fact that the SCO is holding events in these countries in the time period studied. For example, the SCO summit in 2019 in Bishkek. The least mentioned countries in the articles are the new members of the SCO, Pakistan and India, which indicates that they have not been very active within the SCO yet, or their participation is not of great importance for the PRC.

³ 2020 World Press Freedom Index // Reporters without borders. URL: <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2020> (accessed: 22.01.2022).

Table 1

**Mentions of SCO Member Countries
in the Selection of Articles**

Country	Number of mentions
Kyrgyzstan	157
Russia	143
Tajikistan	93
Uzbekistan	61
Kazakhstan	55
India	45
Pakistan	38

Source: compiled by the authors.

Despite some differences in the way further development of the SCO is seen (Denisov & Safranchuk, 2016), the articles present Russia as an important partner, its contribution in holding the SCO events is noted, and it is mentioned that Beijing and Moscow oppose Western hegemonism together.

The narrative in the Chinese media aligns with researchers' opinion that an important factor in the PRC and the Russian Federation cooperation in Central Asia is opposing the U.S. Eurasian policy (Zabella, Katkova & Shabaga, 2021, p. 85). The article "Foreign-affairs Chiefs of the SCO members say no to stigmatizing the epidemic" describes the response of the SCO members to unsubstantiated allegations of the USA towards China and Russia during the pandemic. The article contains words of support addressed to China from Russia and Pakistan, and there are also quotes of Sergey Lavrov and Russian political experts criticizing the US conduct during the pandemic: "During the period of the coronavirus pandemic, the USA pressed unsubstantiated charges against Russia and China, mindlessly criticized the WHO and tried to enforce the rules created by the USA in other countries, putting more pressure on the countries pursuing independent foreign policy."⁴

⁴ Shanghe waizhang hui xiang yiqing wuminghua shuobu // Huánqiú Shíbào [Foreign-affairs Chiefs of the SCO members say NO to stigmatizing the epidemic // *Global Times*]. May 14, 2020. (In Chinese). URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/3yEx4ncoty3> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

The five articles also tend to mention the U.S. in a negative context against the backdrop of the U.S. — China war and challenging relationships between Beijing and Washington. China, Russia, India and Iran talk about problems in their relations with the USA. Having a common enemy seems to unite SCO members. Most mentions were found in the articles of *Global Times*, which can be explained by its specialization in international news and a more critical point of view.

The presence of a common enemy seems to unite SCO members. Most mentions were found in *Global Times* articles, which can be explained by its specialization in international news and its more critical point of view.

The U.S. approach to Afghanistan, where maintaining peace and stability has always been one of the SCO's top priorities, is presented as irresponsible and undermining the work of the SCO. In the article "The SCO's Foreign affairs ministers speak about the Afghan problem" we can find Wang Yi's suggestions concerning the Afghan issue, for instance: "...Not to let the USA get away with the situation. The USA is the cause of the Afghan problem, and they cannot just wash their hands of the situation, burdening other countries of the region with the problem."⁵

The results of the frame analysis with the number of identified frames are presented in Table 2. All the frames were divided into two groups: the frames in the first group interpret the work of the SCO as an organization, and the second group estimates the activity of certain member state.

Most frequently, the articles mention the SCO playing a key role in solving important international and regional problems (the frame "Solving international and regional problems" appears 44 times). Economic and security issues

⁵ Shanghai zuzhi waizhang hui jiu Afuhan wenti fasheng // Huánqiú Shíbào [The SCO's Ministers of Foreign Affairs speak about the Afghan problem // *Global Times*]. July 15, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/43wRjKjYidRV> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

are mentioned almost as often; amongst the latter, the greatest attention is drawn to fighting terrorism and drug trafficking. In *Global Times*, they say that the SCO gives an exact definition to terrorism, separatism, and extremism; within the SCO, a regulatory framework for counterterrorism and anti-extremism cooperation has been developed, and its units effectively fight drug trafficking in Eurasia. The above-mentioned Afghan problem has undivided attention. Thus, the role of the SCO — Afghanistan contact group is mentioned, through which “makes a significant contribution to conflict regulation.”⁶

Table 2

The Results of Frame-analysis

No.	Frame	Number of mentions
<i>Characteristics of the SCO</i>		
1	Solving international and regional problems	44
2	Complementing other Chinese initiatives	31
3	The development of the organization and the rise of its status in world politics	24
4	Establishing a new system of international relations	16
5	Cooperation difficulties	1
<i>Characteristics of the SCO member states</i>		
6	China's contribution	52
7	Contribution of other SCO member states	16
8	China's achievements	11
9	Achievements of other SCO member states	2

Source: compiled by the authors.

As for economic problems, the most frequent challenges mentioned are trade protectionism and the digitalization of the economy. One article cites the opinion of the SCO chief delegates on “the necessity

⁶ Shanghe ershi nian, zujing guoji guanxi minzhuhua // Huánqiu Shíbào [20th anniversary of the SCO, cooperation in democratization of international relations // *Global Times*]. June 16, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/43YPeI9BHfZ> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

to further deepen cooperation in collective building of open world economy, to constantly strengthen open, inclusive, transparent, non-discriminatory and diverse trade system, based on the rules of the World Trade Organization, and to act against all forms of international and regional protectionism and one-sided approach.”⁷ In the publications one can see criticism of populism and protectionism from the General Secretary of the SCO (2019—2021) Vladimir Norov.⁸ From our perspective, these ideas are irrelevant when it comes to cooperation within the SCO, and they tend to be a direct reference to the American-Chinese trade war waged by President Donald Trump in 2018, during which the US imposed a number of tariffs on Chinese goods (Steinbock, 2018). The frame is also represented by articles describing the SCO's projects aimed at developing transportation routes and logistics centers for trade expansion between China and countries of Central Asia.

In addition to economics and security, Chinese newspapers talk about the SCO's contribution to the development of humanitarian cooperation, for example, programs aimed at preserving cultural sites and developing tourism; they also talk about helping member states in fight against the coronavirus. Ten out of the 30 articles published in 2020—2021 address the topic of fighting the pandemic. They contain a plea to cooperate, highlight the PRC's

⁷ Shanghai hezuo zuzhi chengguoyuan zhengfu shounao (zongli) lishihui dishiba ci huiyi lianhe gongbao // Rénmín Wǎng [Joint Communiqué of the Eighteenth Meeting of the Council of Heads of Government (Prime Ministers) of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization // *People's Daily online*]. November 3, 2019. (In Chinese). URL: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1103/c419242-31434387.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

⁸ Shanghe zuzhi mishuzhang huyu waiguo shili tingzhi ganshe Xianggang shiwu // Rénmín Wǎng [General Secretary of the SCO calls to foreign powers to stop interfering with Hongkong's affairs // *People's Daily online*]. June 14, 2020. (In Chinese). URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0614/c1002-31746080.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

contribution to the fight against the epidemic and emphasize the role of the SCO: “[The SCO] General Secretary says that member states of the SCO help each other, share their experience in how to fight the epidemic and administer financial, economic, and humanitarian aid.”⁹ The SCO General Secretary’s call to avoid politicizing the virus, which indirectly criticizes the US tactics,¹⁰ is also mentioned in the articles. Hence, the SCO is represented as a multipurpose organization, which contributes significantly to solving regional problems. From the representation of some issues, it can be concluded that for China, the SCO is not only a platform for economic cooperation and dealing with lingering problems (Afghanistan, terrorism, drug trafficking), but also an alliance to counter protectionism in Eurasia.

In another set of publications, the SCO is framed as one of the elements of Chinese foreign policy strategy (the frame “Supplementing other Chinese initiatives” appears 31 times). The organization is mentioned alongside the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the concept “Community with a shared future for mankind.” On the one hand, the SCO is shown as a channel for promoting Belt and Road Initiative. For instance, it says that “China hopes that the SCO will become a platform to promote building of Belt and Road” among other countries, to facilitate coordination of all countries’ development strategies, and will boost “the hearth of Shanghai cooperation.”¹¹

⁹ Shanghe zuzhi mishuzhang huyu waiguo shili tingzhi ganshe Xianggang shiwu // *Rénmín Wǎng* [General Secretary of the SCO calls to foreign powers to stop interfering with Hongkong’s affairs // *People’s Daily online*]. June 14, 2020. (In Chinese). URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2020/0614/c1002-31746080.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Li Keqiang jiang chuxi Shanghai hezuo zuzhi chengyuanguo zhengfu shounao (zongli) lishihui dibaci huiyi bing dui Wuzhibekesitan jinxing zhengshi fangwen, chuxi Dongya hezuo lingdaoren xilie huiyi bing dui Taiguo jinxing zhengshi fangwen // *Rénmín Wǎng* [Li Keqiang takes part in the 18th Meeting of the SCO Member states

However, there is no discussion of certain measures or coordination mechanisms of the SCO and the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. On the other hand, it’s not only that the SCO helps to develop BRI, but also vice versa. The goals of the BRI correlate with national strategies for the development of the SCO’s member states. For example, there is a quote by General Secretary (2019—2021) Vladimir Norov stating that “with the support of the Belt and Road Initiative, the [SCO] member states will establish a wider, more open, mutually beneficial, and equal partnership.”¹²

The next most frequently mentioned frame is “The Development of the organization and the growth of its status in the world,” which appeared 24 times in the text. It emphasizes the scale of the organization, its demand in the world, and the consolidation of its role. The SCO is shown as an important and large international organization that is spreading its influence.¹³ It implicitly indicates the successes and acknowledgement of the PRC on the world stage as one of the founding states and leaders of the SCO. At the same time, the problem of reaching a consensus with growing numbers of member states is totally ignored.

In the articles about the SCO, the “Creation of a new international relations system” frame appears 16 times. As a part of the frame, it is emphasized that the SCO contributes to the creation of a new system of international relations. The current system is described as

leaders (prime-ministers) and officially visits Uzbekistan, takes part in the Meeting of ASEAN leaders and officially visits Thailand // *People’s Daily online*]. October 29, 2019. (In Chinese). URL: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2019/1029/c64094-31425080.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹² Shanghe shifanqu wei jingmao hezuo tigong juejia pingtai // *Rénmín Wǎng* [Demonstration zone of Shanghai cooperation is the perfect platform for economic and trade cooperation // *People’s Daily online*]. May 28, 2019. (In Chinese). URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0528/c1002-31106711.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹³ Shanghe fenghui lichang duobianzhuyi // *Huánqiu Shíbào* [Shanghai Cooperation Summit promotes multilateralism // *Global Times*]. November 11, 2020. (In Chinese). URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/40eTOFPnEch> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

unstable and ambiguous, with unilateralism, protectionism, mentality of cold war period, and some countries threatening others.¹⁴ The new system implies rejection of the cold war period mentality, protectionism and interference with sovereign countries' affairs; it implies promotion of the "Shanghai spirit." The latter means mutual trust, benefit, equality, guidance, respect to different civilizations, pursuit of common development, overcoming civilizational conflicts, etc.¹⁵ In one of the articles, Wang Yi calls for the SCO member states to work together to contribute to building of a new type of international relations and the "Community with a shared future for mankind."¹⁶ As a rule, the texts defined by this frame consist of set and repetitive expressions, such as "shifting away from zero-sum game," "uprooting the cold war mentality," and the passage is concluded by the idea of creation of "Community with a shared future for mankind."

Finally, the last frame characterizing the SCO is "Challenges of cooperation," which only appeared in one article and contained a mention of a frontier conflict between India and China. Challenges in Indian-Chinese relations and their influence on the cooperation within the SCO did not get their due coverage; similarly, the Indian-Pakistani conflict, which escalated in 2019, was not mentioned at all. On the contrary, one article says that despite having

two conflicting members, such as India and Pakistan, the organization has not lost its effectiveness. Moreover, the article argues against the existence of contradictions between the two "tigers", Russia and China, "expected by the West."¹⁷ This proves that China prefers not to "wash dirty linen in public" and prefers to represent the SCO to the readers as a strong organization, united by the "Shanghai spirit" and with no internal disagreements.

The analysis of the second set of frames dedicated to China's role within the SCO shows that the articles usually refer to China's contribution to the development of the organization and member states of the SCO (the frame "the PRC's contribution" appears 52 times). In particular, in the article dedicated to the Ministers of foreign affairs for member states of the SCO board meeting and the Ministers of foreign affairs "the SCO — contact group of Afghanistan" meeting, they discussed the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan and the amount of land taken over by Taliban¹⁸ after that. They then listed five suggestions from the representative of the PRC¹⁹ on how to stabilize the current situation. It is interesting that the information about the PRC's financial support to the organization or member states appeared in the articles only a couple of times. This can be explained by a reluctance to cause readers' disapproval, with

¹⁴ Wang Yi chuxi Shanghai hezuo zuzhi waizhang huiyi // Rénmín Wǎng [Wang Yi takes part in the SCO's Ministers of foreign affairs Meeting // People's Daily online]. May 23, 2019. (In Chinese). URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0523/c1002-31098614.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹⁵ Shanghai hezuo zuzhi minjian youhao luntan zhiku fenluntan zai Wuhan juxing // Rénmín Wǎng [The Subforum of the SCO's ethnic solidarity analytical center takes place in Wuhan // People's Daily online]. June 03, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0603/c1002-32121608.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹⁶ Wang Yi chuxi Shanghai hezuo zuzhi waizhang huiyi // Rénmín Wǎng [Wang Yi takes part in the SCO's member states Ministers of foreign affairs Meeting // People's Daily online]. May 23, 2019. (In Chinese). URL: <http://world.people.com.cn/n1/2019/0523/c1002-31098614.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹⁷ Fengyutongzhou ershi nian! "Shanghe dajia ting" zhan shang xin qidian, e meizhe 20 nian zhishi manchang zhengcheng de kaishi // Huánqiú Shíbào [We have been in the same boat for 20 years! "The Shanghai Cooperation Family" has a new starting point, Russian media: These 20 years have been just the beginning of a great journey Global Times]. September 18, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: <https://opinion.huanqiu.com/article/49Ytp9YxMO> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

¹⁸ Hereinafter, an organization included in the list of terrorist organizations in the Russian Federation is mentioned.

¹⁹ Shanghai zuzhi waizhang hui jiu Afuhan wenti fasheng // Huánqiú Shíbào [The SCO's Ministers of foreign affairs speak about the Afghan problem // Global Times]. July 15, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/43wRjkYidRV> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

the possibility that readers might question the rationality of the expenses, given the level of poverty in the PRC.

It is worth noting that the PRC's contribution has been noted by both SCO partners and citizens of member countries. For instance, the article published shortly before the Heads of SCO's states board meeting in Bishkek and Cooperation and confidence-building measures session in Asia held in Tajikistan says that "People from all the strata of society in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are looking forward to General Secretary Xi Jinping's visit and believe that this visit will strengthen relations between the two countries and China and will contribute significantly to promotion of peace and development in the region."²⁰ The article contains statements from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan citizens in which they speak positively of both the PRC's activities in their countries and of Xi Jinping. For example, an employee of a Thermal power plant (TPP) in Dushanbe says: "My personal success and the development of facilities, which will lead to changes in basic energy infrastructure of Tajikistan, are inseparable from the help and support from Xi Jinping, the government of China and Chinese companies... If I have an opportunity, I would like to thank Xi Jinping in person."²¹

Whereas Chinese media tend to highlight the achievements of the PRC, other countries' contributions get significantly less coverage (the frame "Contribution of other member states of the SCO" appears 16 times). Most often, the contributions of other countries to the development of the organization were mentioned during major events and the

mentions had to do with the activities of the country where the event took place. One gets the impression that mentioning other countries' contributions is simply an act of formal gratitude.

In the articles about the SCO, one can often come across passages about the PRC's domestic achievements (11 appearances of the frame "PRC's successes"), despite the SCO being an international organization. In an interview with a General Secretary of the SCO dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the organization, two of the seven questions asked by a Chinese reporter referred to the PRC's achievements. The first question was: "At the Civic friendship forum of the SCO, which took place in Wuhan earlier this month, development of rural areas and poverty reduction became very important topics. Are you following China's progress in fighting poverty"? Responding to the second question on fighting against the coronavirus, General Secretary of the SCO (2019—2021) V.I. Norov expressed approval of the prevention and control system in China and praised the Chinese vaccine and Beijing's contribution to the global fight against the epidemic.²² As for other member states of the SCO, their successes were mentioned in our data selection only twice.

Conclusion

In the Chinese media, the SCO is presented as a versatile international organization, which pays attention to various spheres of cooperation. Frame analysis shows that the articles often focus on the achievements of the SCO, while the challenges are almost always ignored. Difficulties in decision making and existing disagreements between the member states have no coverage at all. The spirits of consensus and development prospects come to the fore. The

²⁰ Jierjisitan he Tajikesitan gejie reqie qidai Xi Jinping zhuxi fangwen bing chuxi Shanghe zhuzhi fenghui he Yaxin fenghui // *Rénmín Wǎng* [All the strata of society in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are looking forward to President Xi Jinping's visit and his participation in the SCO Summit and the CICA Summit // People's Daily online]. June 10, 2019. (In Chinese). URL: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/BIG5/n1/2019/0610/c419242-31126395.html> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Shanghe ershi nian, zujing guoji guanxi minzhuhua // *Huánqiú Shíbào* [20th anniversary of the SCO, cooperation in democratization of international relations // Global Times]. June 16, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: <https://world.huanqiu.com/article/43YPe19BHfZ> (accessed: 14.12.2021).

organization is positioned as a stepping stone for solving regional problems, such as drug trafficking, and global ones, amongst which trade protectionism is mentioned. It is worth noting that the SCO is framed as an alliance of countries opposing Western hegemony and advocating the transformation of international relations. The SCO is represented as an important element in the PRC's foreign policy alongside the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the details of their cooperation are not discussed. Hence, we see no confirmation in the discourse that with the launch of the BRI, the PRC has completely lost interest in the SCO, which continues to perform a number of vital functions for the PRC's government, from fighting terrorism to opposing Western hegemony.

China is often portrayed as the driving force of the organization, which is partially true,

and partially is the result of the international news domestication. Apart from the PRC's contribution to the development of the SCO, China's achievements outside the organization are also covered: success in fighting poverty and preventing the spread of the coronavirus. The achievements of other member states are covered much less often. Chinese readers are shown their country's achievements, with the goal of legitimizing the regime and promoting national pride. To create this type of frame, newspapers turn to citing foreigners loyal to the PRC. Another interesting observation is that when describing the PRC's contribution to the development of the SCO, there is almost no information about its financial expenses. This can be explained by a reluctance to cause the disapproval of readers, who might question the rationality of the expenses.

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