Chapter 6

A Comparative Analysis of China vis-à-vis SCO and ARF

6.1 Introduction

On the basis of the findings of the preceding two chapters, this chapter makes a comparative analysis of China vis-à-vis SCO and ARF. It also compares Chinese responses towards both the organisations as well as the regional dynamics of two distinct regions. China's response towards these organisations has corresponded to regional peculiarities and changing contexts of regional and global geo-political security scenario. The broad contexts of Cold War history of the regions, the impact of the post-Cold War international politics on the regions, and the rise of China as a major regional power played a substantive role in both the organisations. To gauge the extent and content of China's engagement with these two organisations, one has to look into the dynamics of the regions in which they have emerged, by first taking note of the regions independent of China and then with reference to China.

Establishment and organisational structure of SCO and ARF, the global and regional security contexts, economic and non-traditional security issues, response of the regions to SCO and ARF and China's response to SCO and ARF form parts of this chapter.

6.2 Establishment of SCO and ARF

SCO and ARF are not only products of two different regional-political milieus but also of two different time horizons, which accordingly have shaped the structure and roles of both organisations. ARF was conceptualized and created when the Cold War had just ended. Moreover, from the perspective of ASEAN countries, with the partial withdrawal of US, there was considerable vacuum which might be filled by China. It was also the time when the ASEAN region was witnessing deeper economic integration. These reasons compelled ASEAN to accommodate both the US and China to pre-empt any contestation between the two. Therefore, ASEAN expanded itself and incorporated China in ASEAN+3 and both the US and China in ARF. Thus,
in particular temporal and regional context of Southeast Asia, ARF evolved structurally as a much more open organisation and functionally as a consultative one. On the other hand, SCO was created almost five years after the Cold War ended during which time the US had demonstrated its supremacy in international politics. By this time Russia had also recuperated its political will, and China was increasingly being acknowledged as a potential great power which could create alternative power centre in international politics. Central Asia provided them with an opportunity to test their capability to check American power in this region as its presence became a source of serious concern for them. Therefore, they initiated the establishment of Shanghai-5 which eventually evolved into SCO. Besides, the stated goal of the creation of SCO was to fight terrorism, extremism and separatism. Thus, SCO emerged as an organisation much more compact in size and coherent in its role and function. Because of its compactness, its critics call it a 'closed block' like one of those that belonging to the Cold War period.

Though both came into existence in the post-Cold War era, ARF in Southeast Asia predates SCO in Central Asia. The case of SCO being a product of the disintegration is much clearer and more direct than that of ARF for had the USSR not disintegrated, SCO would not have been formed. One can safely argue that it came out of debris of the USSR. On the other hand, ARF has been indirectly influenced by power vacuum created by the demise of the USSR and more importantly due to the deeper economic integration of the region besides the rise of China and the partial withdrawal of the US from the region.

6.2 (a) China

The Chinese angle was central to the creation of both the organisations. It is true that SCO is the only prominent and celebrated international organisation in the creation of which China played an instrumental role. China is a founder member of SCO and its precursor. Moreover, very evidently, the organisation is named after one of the important Chinese cities, Shanghai.

SCO grew out of Shanghai-5 and intended to resolve border problems among Russia, former republics of Soviet Union, and China. Apart from managing borders, creating confidence-building measures was the second key point in the agenda of Shanghai-5. SCO is essentially a broadened framework of Shanghai-5, with enhanced
responsibilities, greater role, and institutionalisation. As far as Chinese angle behind forming ARF is concerned, one of the immediate security concerns for the ASEAN countries was how to cope with China's rise in the wake of sudden power vacuum caused by American withdrawal from the region after the end of the Cold War.

6.2 (b) Russia

In spite of China appearing to be more active in SCO, the country that matters most to four Central Asian member countries of the organisation is Russia. In fact SCO, among many other regional processes in Central Asia, is a kind of reintegration in post-Soviet era wherein Russia is trying to gain its lost ground in this region. Though China's role in the formation of SCO cannot be discounted, Russian role is equally important. Russia's presence in Central Asia works as a deterrent against China assuming leadership role in the region.

6.3 Organisational Structure of SCO and ARF

ARF has primarily been dedicated to consultative and confidence building mechanisms. ARF avoids institutional rigidity and does not expect its member states to take any narrow approach. It aims at keeping all channels and windows open for dialogue and negotiation. As of now, it does not aspire to become a security community like NATO. But it is carrying out a range of confidence building activities and providing a meaningful platform for dialogue and discussion. In fact, this approach towards institutionalisation is quite reflective of that of ASEAN. ASEAN has been very conscious in its pace. Since beginning ASEAN has taken recourse to a gradualist approach. It has been very incremental from including new members to adding new issues to its agenda. This very approach reflects in ARF as well.

On the other hand, SCO is still an organisation in the making. But the way it has created various institutions and laid foundations through a host of declarations and policy statements and has been continuously chalking out new programmes augur well for its future. The Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan are the members of SCO. They are only six in number, whereas more than two dozen countries are the participants in the ARF: Australia, Bangladesh,
Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Indonesia, Japan, Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea, Republic of Korea, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Russian Federation, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, United States and Vietnam. The difference in number of participants brings qualitative difference in the functioning. The sheer number of the member countries in ARF is sufficient reason to argue that its emergence as a coherent organisation with clearly defined goals will always be more difficult than that of SCO. ARF consists of such a vast number of countries with divergent security interests that beyond a point it cannot have a common security agenda. Though SCO also does have internal contradictions, it still presents a more coherent picture mainly because of the compactness of its size which facilitates a convergence of interests among member states.

In terms of organisational evolution, ARF was born out of the collective process of ASEAN. On the other hand, SCO was created by two big powers from outside the region, though its links can be traced to the process of Shanghai-5 – the two agreements signed by the five heads of state of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People's Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan in Shanghai in 1996 and in Moscow in 1997 respectively, on confidence-building in the military sphere, and on mutual reduction of military forces in the border areas. And the summary documents were signed during their meetings in Alma-Ata (1998), Bishkek (1999) and Dushanbe (2000).

6.4 Security Context

Security context includes both the global and regional scenarios. Both the scenarios drastically changed after 1991, the period of the present study. Drastic changes in both the scenarios were effected by the disintegration of the USSR. During the entire Cold-War period, members of the international community were in constant tussle either to prove their ideological allegiance while keeping their independence intact or prove their neutrality. But with the disintegration of the USSR, in the post-Cold War period, they have a new challenge to withstand American hegemonic pressure. However, in this period, several new states came into existence in Central Asia because of the break up of the USSR, which produced new regional dynamics.
Moreover, the ASEAN countries stopped to be a Cold War theatre, which provided them an opportunity to integrate with other big powers like China, in more autonomous way and on more measured terms.

6.4 (a) Global Context

During the entire Cold War period, the world witnessed two superpowers counterbalancing each other’s influence. Since 1991 with the break up of the USSR, stability created by Yalta system received a severe jolt. It may be a coincidence but the US found an immediate opportunity in the Gulf Crisis of 1991 to drive a message home that it was only the US whose supremacy would prevail in the world. Second attendant implication of the end of Cold War has been the rise of radical Islam as a potent rival of the US-led Western world. Radical Islam does not accept the validity of borders demarcated by modern state.

China has taken serious note of both these post-Cold War developments. With the collapse of the USSR, China emerged as a major powerful country after the US in terms of overall military, political and economic clout. For ideological, economic and other strategic reasons, Sino-US mistrust resurfaced and came to the fore after the disintegration of the USSR. Throughout 1990s and even after, reverberations of Sino-US rivalry have been felt worldwide. Trade war between the two countries in mid-1990s and heightened tension in the Taiwan Strait around the same time between them became cause célèbre in the international arena. Apart from this, China is affected by Islamic terrorism. Islamists in Central Asia want to snatch its Xinjiang region which is a major concern for China. This issue is so much important for China that it is willing to fight terrorism in Central Asia, a common agenda with the US. China supported US’ ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan. Disintegration of the USSR and consequent end of the Cold War also brought about changes in strategic calculations at China’s eastern flank. Here, the issue of Taiwan once again came to limelight as the US-Japan axis consolidated more. From Chinese point of view, there is a difference between the Southeast Asia strategic scenario and the Central Asian strategic scenario. In the Southeast Asia, it has to compete with the US only. On the other hand, the situation in the Central Asia is more complex as it has more competitors trying to maximize their influence. This larger security scenario with reference to American hegemony and China’s attempt to cope with it shaped its security
understanding towards Central Asia and Southeast Asia which, in turn, determined its approach towards multilateralism in Central Asia and Southeast Asia.

Though Russia and China are natural partners vis-à-vis Central Asia because of geographical and historical reasons, US presence yields equal significance in the region. In fact, Central Asia has turned out to be an extended frontier of the US, mainly because of its 'War on Terror'. Apart from this, the US has stakes in the energy resources of the region also. Thus regional instability combined with worrisome American military and strategic presence became an immediate background for Russia and China taking keen interest in creating SCO. Such powerful American presence definitely undermines Russia as a single power in the region or for that matter China's influence in the region. There is no sign of America giving up its pursuit of national interests in the region. The US presence – which in many cases is not very far away from actual Chinese borders – is a matter of serious concern for China. Though Chinese and US interests may converge on some issues like terrorism, its presence in the region has been causing uneasiness in China. American presence not only indirectly occasioned the creation of SCO, but right from its inception it has also cast its shadow over the inner dynamics of SCO. On the other hand, the US is formally a member of ARF. Though US partially withdrew from the region after the end of the Cold War, it had huge economic stakes in the region. Apart from that it had strategic commitments towards Japan, Taiwan and Korea. It could not simply abandon them. Moreover, ASEAN countries, too, wanted it to stay in the region and ARF. With the resolution of Cambodian crisis and every Southeast Asian country becoming member of ASEAN one after another, this region was left with no overt issue of tension. However, the countries of the region were aware of their larger security vulnerability. Therefore, they wanted simultaneous Chinese and American presence in the region softly counterbalancing each other. Thus in the post Cold War period, ARF, in a way, became such a platform for both China and the US.

Both ARF and SCO have worked as safety valves against American hegemony and chipped away American influence. According to Rosemary Foot, in Chinese strategy accommodation of the US and transformation of international society in the longer run form part of its two-pronged strategy to cope with the US hegemony. China envisages multilateral bodies to cope with American hegemony. Interestingly, the US also visualizes the role of these bodies in taming or socializing
China internationally. Multilateralism provides a venue for China to engage Japan, lessen the US influence in its neighbouring regions, and remove misperceptions about it, and thereby to achieve a peaceful environment for economic development. China has really outdistanced the US in many respects in the Southeast Asian region. China has cultivated support and goodwill in the region to the extent that the regional countries have clearly shown their inclination towards China by giving attention to its sensibilities, sometimes even defying the US especially on the issues of Human Rights and Taiwan. It has certainly scored over Japan on the issue of militarization of Japan. To a great extent, credit goes to China's approach and consistent interaction. ARF has provided a venue where China and the ASEAN countries do have a meaningful dialogue. China has been contributing to the confidence building measures adopted within the framework of ARF. In SCO, China along with Russia has been clearly conveying a message that they have 'first right' over everything related to Central Asia. For China, American presence is not something which can be appreciated or taken for granted; however, China is ready to accommodate it for the imperative of curbing terrorism. But this accommodation is less in Central Asia than in Southeast Asia. Despite the fact that SCO in its own right is dedicated to contain terrorism, cooperation with the US on the same issue is not done within the framework of SCO, whereas in Southeast Asia, to set pace and course of transformation is primarily ASEAN's prerogative. It has its own agenda and deadlines for cooperation in the realms of polity, security and trade. On the other hand, in SCO, as observed in its various declarations and joint communiqués, a solid foundation has been laid for a long-lasting transformation through regional cooperation. What is to be seen is the extent to which regional players can build and capitalize on it. China, being in a lead role and position in SCO, makes a major contribution in every decision that SCO takes.

6.4 (b) Regional Context

For China, security situation in Central Asia is of immediate concern whereas security scenario in the ASEAN countries is more or less stable. It can be contended that SCO is functioning amidst far more uncertainty and instability than ARF. After the Cambodian crisis was resolved, there is no major issue left in the Southeast Asian region that can be characterized as of immediate concern, or that can cause instability in the region. There are, however, maritime territorial issues involving China in South
China Sea, which demand settlement. But there is no likelihood of the situation getting out of hand in the near future on these issues. In Chinese characterization also, security scenario in this region is relatively stable. Contrary to this peace and stability in the ASEAN region, the situation is not so normal in Central Asia. In mid-1990s, Tajikistan faced a full-fledged civil war in which even Russia had to step in. Violent skirmishes involving mainly Uzbekistan with its neighbors have been quite frequent. Uzbek-Kazakh rivalry has been an important feature in regional politics. Islamic terrorism in Central Asia coupled with Afghanistan, its epicenter, has acquired a new dimension where the interests of China, Russia, America and authoritarian regimes of the region converge to the maximum possible extent. Apart from this, situation of other security concerns like transnational crime, especially drug trafficking, is also critical.

Central Asia is also experiencing more aggressive superpower competition than the ASEAN region. Largely due to the availability of rich energy resources in the region and international Islamic terrorism, all three big powers – the US, Russia and China – have stakes in the region. As for China, one of its most troubled regions – Xinjiang – lies at the western front and constitutes its core security concern due to the active involvement of international Islamists. To much of China's concern, this region is part and parcel of the map which international Islamists in Central Asia are striving to redraw. There are a host of terrorist organisations operating in Central Asia, which are driven by either Pan-Islamic or Pan-Turkic cause. Many of these organisations like Organisation for the Liberation of Uighurstan, Wolves of Lop Nor, Xinjiang Liberation Organisation and Uighur Liberation Organisation attempt to destabilise China in their pursuit of freeing Xinjiang. Security impact of terrorist organisations working in the region goes beyond the region and enters neighbouring countries, on which much attention of SCO is diverted. Russia has also been fighting against Islamist and separatist violence in Chechnya. Central Asia has strategic importance in providing logistics to the US in its 'global war on terror'. America is even accused of creating instability in the region in order to make its military and strategic presence permanent just to access rich energy reservoirs of the region. Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan was understood to have been sponsored by the US.

The security issues that have concerned ARF more are related with maritime disputes of South China Sea and North Korean nuclear crisis. It is to the credit of
ARF that it has persuaded China to discuss these issues in its forum. As for North Korean nuclear issue, ARF has always stood for its peaceful resolution and appreciated China for attempting to resolve it peacefully. Therefore, on the whole, ARF basically deals more with soft security issues. Though the menace of terrorism has reached Southeast Asia, it has not acquired the proportion as in Central Asia. Thus, SCO is much more concerned about terrorism than ARF.

A subtle competition between China and the US is definitely going on in the Southeast Asian region for influence. But this competition does not appear as aggressive as it is in Central Asia. In the competition on both sides, China is relatively comfortable in Central Asia as China and Russia agree on several issues concerning this region and Xinjiang problem does not have international dimension as that of Taiwan. In dealing with the ASEAN countries, China has to deal with US-Japan alliance. From security point of view, China's participation and interest in SCO is primarily Xinjiang-driven, whereas its primary concern in ARF has been to prevent Taiwan issue from becoming internationalized. Apart from Taiwan, China's main interest in ARF is to ensure that no regional grouping under the leadership of Japan, or through it, is manipulated to encircle China and, maritime disputes of South China Sea do not come on the board. This difference in security scenario can also be seen in the obligations of SCO and ARF. SCO is manifestly committed to handle three evils of terrorism, separatism and extremism that are seen as major destabilizing factors in the region. On the other hand, ARF does not deal with such pressing urgencies of immediate interest. Its concerns are of long-term and strategic nature and are aimed at peace and stability and maintaining balance of power.

For both organisations, security is a paramount issue, which at the same time, is not understood in terms of military defence alone. Neither ARF nor SCO has been conceived as an organisation for collective security. ARF is, of course, far more open in terms of membership and has made every effort to make it amply clear that it is not a closed security organisation, targeting none. SCO, which, on the other hand, is much more closed in terms of membership than ARF, has also avoided becoming a collective security or defence organisation.

Both organisations are functioning under a larger international security context. However, security concerns in the larger international security scenario have not prevailed in the way that can push both organisations in the direction of becoming
collective security or defence organisations. The primary reason for this is that no single country, either US or Russia or China, is in a position to convince regional member countries to bandwagon it. In fact, in post-Cold War scenario, regional member countries are enjoying better bargaining power, and are demonstrating their freedom and independent decision-making. At least, in the case of ARF, one can say that the ASEAN countries have been successfully balancing and canceling out the influence of great powers. In SCO also, on the demand of Uzbekistan, initial anti-American overtones have been toned down. The restricted nature of SCO's membership creates mistrust in the sense that Russia and China, eventually, want it to become another Warsaw Pact. However, in last couple of years observer status have been accorded to many countries including India in SCO. China seems to have no objection to have India as an observer in SCO.

6.5 Economic and Non-Traditional Security Issues

In the post-Cold War world, economic integration witnessed a deepening process producing convergence among various regions. This process also brought non-traditional security issues to the fore. Technological advancement has benefited non-state actors too, and makes their clandestine operations easier, which demands lot more sophisticated and cooperative security management across borders. In fact, both ARF and SCO mainly deal with non-traditional security concerns. China has recognized threats to national boundaries from non-state actors. These threats come in the form of crimes of various kinds, and violent political challenges from cultural grounds to nation state. Thus multilateralism in Chinese security policy has developed in the light of growing concerns emanating from non-traditional security, though some of the traditional security issues also remain important. The difference is that China has emerged as a willing partner to cooperate in the realm of non-security issues, but it appears not very enthusiastic in bringing traditional security issues pertaining to state sovereignty in the purview of multilateral security framework. China's bid to keep border and territorial disputes away from multilateral purview becomes very clear in relation to ARF. China does not have to face this dilemma in SCO as it has solved border disputes with Russia and the Central Asian republics.
bilaterally. In fact, SCO appears to be more focused vis-à-vis non-traditional security issues.

6.6 Globalisation

ARF and SCO were established at a time when China's integration with global economy was in full swing. In fact, China's positive approach to globalisation and its decision to be deeply integrated with the global economy also shaped its policy on multilateralism. This is true not only in the case of ARF and SCO but also regarding WTO and other forums. This engagement has brought in sophistication and refinement in China's diplomacy. Integration with the world economy has served three distinct purposes of China's foreign policy. First, this engagement is promoted to meet its economic requirements of modernization. Second, it has brought first-hand realization of unbridgeable differences between China and America in terms of overall military, technological and economic capabilities in the immediate future. Having entered this process, China soon realized that differences between itself and the US are insurmountable. This realization made China revise its position on multilateralism. Multipolarity being a distant possibility, China accepted multilateralism as an achievable second best option. Though China found certain aspects of US hegemony objectionable, it accepted multilateralism as a stabilizing process. Thirdly, through globalisation China is consolidating its regional policy. Not only vis-à-vis the US but neighbouring regions also, globalisation is a strategic choice for China as it makes its motives unthreatening. The Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 was not only an eye-opener for China as it revealed destabilizing side of globalisation, and indicated how it would challenge national sovereignty and prosperity as well but also was an opportunity for China to prove its credentials of being a reliable neighbour and trustworthy participant in the process of regional integration.

Globalisation as a strategic policy is seen in full play in the Southeast Asian region. In fact, as has been mentioned in the second and fourth chapters, this region has had a special role in China's vision for regional cooperation. In this region, China started testing its good-neighbourly policy. China initiated its multilateral bids seriously in this region in the form of engagement with ASEAN and participation in ARF. The crux of China's good-neighbourly policy was to win over the countries in the region by making them partners in its prosperity. This policy has paid dividends as
it has served three distinct purposes of globalisation as a strategic choice. Integration with the region fulfills its needs of economic development, allays apprehensions of countries of the region, and checkmates the US. China has very deftly used ASEAN and ARF in conveying messages of its good-neighbourly policy. On the western side, China is patiently using regional cooperation and market to stabilize and consolidate its control over Xinjiang and other restive regions like Tibet. China wants SCO to emerge as a vehicle of mutual cooperation in the region.

6.7 Other Issues

Apart from these critical issues encircling SCO's security concerns, other issues are drug trafficking; human, especially women, trafficking; transnational crime; water management; refugee problems and access to energy resources. Of these, issues like narco-trafficking, human trafficking, illegal migration and spread of small arms are the security issues which concern not only China but also both the organisations. However, terrorism is an issue of special importance to SCO whereas naval and maritime security issues are of special concern to ARF.

In comparison to SCO, ARF is working in a relatively peaceful and stable environment where development related issues are at the fore. It is so because ASEAN is much more occupied with the goal of economic development in comparison to SCO. SCO has also taken up some issues of economic cooperation. It highlights usefulness of cooperation for economic well being. But SCO and ARF are organisations, which are primarily security-oriented.

As is clear, Central Asia has rich energy resources which China wants to exploit. It has two prime considerations in accessing these resources: to secure energy supply and to strategically use them in order to speed up process of development in its western region and thereby lessen the influence of the separatist forces. Central Asia provides not only large energy reservoirs for China to access but also the connectivity to other energy rich regions like West Asia and Europe. Increasing supply of energy, diversifying sources, and securitizing them are priorities of highest order for China. To achieve these goals, China intends to improve its relations with Central Asian republics, and revive old silk route. Reviving old silk route is its long term agenda. Revival of this route will effectively mean its direct connectivity up to Caucasian
region and Europe. Therefore, SCO becomes an important platform in its vision related to Central Asia as it has the potential to bring every Central Asian state together where it can convince them and shape their perception about itself, and thus improve security scenario in the region.

The role of SCO in economic development goes beyond energy sector. It has taken a position on improving 'investor's climate, based upon principles of mutual benefit and equal rights.' SCO under its banner has organized activities for trade and investment promotion. Sectors like transport, telecommunications, science, technology and agriculture also have attracted attention of SCO. Exploration of oil and gas deposits, construction of oil and gas pipelines as well as the need to conduct interaction in the field of information and telecommunication technology has also been areas of interest for SCO. It has taken many initiatives in establishing expert working groups on issues of fuel and energy. SCO, in principle, agreed to set up an SCO Development Fund. SCO has been active in cultural and educational spheres among its member states. SCO has recognized the importance of ICT. It wants to use it to curb transnational crime. In SCO's perception, ICT can be effectively employed in promoting closer ties and better integration among diversified cultures and civilizations.

As far as ARF is concerned, it was created by ASEAN to deal mainly with security aspects. Economic and trade and investment promotion related activities are directly dealt by ASEAN. However, from striving to maintain peace and stability to securing sea lanes become part of ARF's agenda to provide trade and other energy security to the region as the South China Sea has also a large oil reserves in which China also has interests.

6.8 Response of the Regions to SCO and ARF

The responses emanating from the regions to SCO and ARF are dependent on their respective divergent regional contexts. ARF reflects regional awakening in the ASEAN region more than SCO does in Central Asia. This is partly related to their respective historical experiences. While ASEAN has had a three decade history, Central Asia emerged out of the Soviet control only recently.
Common cultural grounding prepares bases for China's close cooperation with ASEAN and ARF. Likewise, China has had historic relations with Central Asia in spite of the fact that they do not share the legacy of sinic civilization. However, they are closer to Russia and influence of Russian civilization is quite palpable there. These factors have shaped their perception towards China.

Seeing from the perspective of the region, Southeast Asia is more receptive to China, primarily because of geographical proximity and then because of China's economic development. Initiatives to do away with mutual suspicion were first taken by ASEAN. ASEAN's response to the incidents of Tiananmen Square in 1989 saying that those incidents were China's internal matter was very positively received by China. Thereafter, ASEAN took advantage of every opportunity to prove, both by word and deed, that it was not part of any encirclement policy targeting China. In fact, the decade of 1990s was the time when ASEAN was evolving to be more assertive and independent. Besides, it was looking up to China for its economic growth and integrating with its economy. China's deepening relations with the region are mutually beneficial. Multilateral engagements in forms of ARF have helped China in debunking ‘China’s threat’ theories, mainly propounded by US and Japan.

ARF has a history and legacy of ASEAN. It is to the credit of ASEAN that it is one of the most successful and enduring regional groupings in Asia. It was founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand under Bangkok Declaration. Interestingly, ASEAN emerged as a non-communist regional block but was open to communist countries like Vietnam which joined as its first communist member as late as in 1984. It goes to the credit of the regional leadership of the Southeast Asia that they showed maturity and kept ASEAN a representative of regional aspirations. ASEAN has continuously been growing in number ever since it was founded. First, it brought every Southeast Asian state under its ambit. Secondly, it engaged other regional powers. Thirdly, it expanded its activities in various fields of economy, trade, technology and security. ARF is an example of proliferation of its activities in the field of regional security and regional consciousness, deepening and acquiring space in international politics. One can point out that ARF has evolved from the regional convictions and assertions of the members of ASEAN. That is why in spite of being heard and taken into account by ASEAN countries, and making much headway in the ASEAN region over the years, China still remains an outside power,
like US, in ARF as it is not an ASEAN country, and ARF is essentially run by ASEAN.

However, SCO cannot claim to be a product of the region. The process of SCO coming into being was by and large initiated and guided by external powers such as Russia and China. Central Asian countries that are members of SCO were not so well versed in international diplomacy that SCO could have been their own creation. In fact, as far as cases of assertion of regional and national identities in Central Asia are concerned they are weak, particularly in the context of primordial identities like ethnicity and clan. Despite the fact that Central Asia remained under the communist authority of Soviet Union for around 75 years, medieval traits like role of family, clan, ethnicity and macho hero worship in the politics of this region are still lingering and playing their role. Modern concepts like multilateralism, principles of rule of law, democratic spirit of cooperation, and generalized principles of conduct and cooperation are yet to take strong roots in the region. Central Asian regimes are in the hands of authoritarian rulers, and locus of power in the region is very narrowly based. Middle and entrepreneur classes, whom multilateralism would benefit most, have not developed to the extent that they can effectively create a demand for multilateralism.

Entire political-cultural spectrum is neither very conducive for, nor keen on, multilateralism. In this scenario, Russia and China appear more interested in SCO than the other Central Asian countries. For them, larger geo-political considerations are more pertinent than a regional integration. One should not forget that emergence of strong regional blocks may not be in the interest of big powers all the time. It may be a case of over-expectation from them that they should facilitate such strong regional groupings. In case of Russia and China apropos SCO, this could be a case of even more over-expectation because democracy is the basis of the kind of regional multilateral grouping this research advocates for. And, we know China does not stand for democracy that liberal thought advocates and even Russia's democratic credentials are questionable. However, as a point of departure for Central Asian republics, SCO seems to be providing a platform from where they can balance out Russia, China and America.
6.9 China's Response to SCO and ARF

For a long time China remained in isolation in international politics. In the closing period of Maoist era, China started gradually coming out of this isolation. However, for many years after the formal end of Maoist era in 1978, China considered multilateral organisations as handiwork of imperialist powers, and as a ploy which could encircle China. This anxiety, a product of historical legacy, lingered even till mid-1980s. Thus, initially China was apprehensive of the intentions behind the formation of ARF as well. In China's security perception, ARF was considered to have aimed at containing China. Therefore, China gave a guarded response towards ARF. But 1990s was the time when China and ASEAN had started understanding each other. Mutual suspicion and mistrust gradually began to wane.

China's involvement in multilateral forums picked momentum from 1990 onwards. In this period, China joined various organisations and conventions, and renewed its emphasis on the role and importance of the United Nations. But as mentioned in the third chapter, in the view of Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, China's policy towards multilateralism was "a cautious and vague" one to begin with. The underlying reason for this vagueness and cautiousness was that China was not sure of its strength in a multilateral grouping. Its main worry was that in a grouping where both Japan and the US were present, they will set agenda and try to bring issues related to China's sovereignty under scanner in the name of multilateralism. Thus, since China was not much confident in dealing with great powers, it advocated for loose and informal multilateral structures. Initially, even in economic field it was not very keen on regional trade regimes. Instead of creating region-wide security structure, China wanted informal security arrangement considering the ethnic, religious, social and political diversities in the regions. Its position was that any such structure should evolve out of actual diversities of the regions. China's gradual incorporation into ASEAN and ARF are classic examples of its "cautious and vague" approach towards multilateralism. Before getting fully involved in multilateral regimes in the region, China had to make political arrangements to ensure that it was not entrapped in superpower ploy in the name of multilateralism. However, by the time of the emergence of SCO, this vagueness had withered away. China had acquired sufficient experience of working in multilateral organisations. China had already...
started playing significant role in ASEAN and ARF and joined numerous other conventions and forums before SCO was set up.

China's involvement in ARF and SCO marks a new beginning in its history of national identity, international identification and strategic thinking. In fact, multilateralism acquired space in China's foreign and security policy coinciding with change in China's self-perception in these three realms. China's national identity traversed from revolutionary to a detached one, and then to a status quoist power corresponding to the fact that these changes are reflecting negative, zero and positive international identification. These overall changes shaped its strategic thinking also.

China's engagement with ASEAN and ARF started when China had become a status quoist power and its international identification had transformed into positive one. At the time of SCO's establishment, these characteristics had further intensified. In fact, multilateralism emerges only when international identification is positive and cooperation becomes part of its strategy. Now China is not preoccupied with apprehensions of inevitable systemic catastrophe targeting it and is not busy with preparing for any such eventuality. Instead it has started managing security at more immediate and regional levels. Thus, both the organisations reflect China's security vision and mark the emergence of a China that has faith in its inner strength.

As a result, China's response to ASEAN has been quite positive and confident. It is to the credit of China that it gradually increased its interaction and integration with ASEAN as well as ARF. Gradually, China is seen engaging ARF and increasingly participating in its ventures. China's gesture of cooperation during Asian economic crisis was exemplary. China's matured and measured response to the crisis made the public opinion in the region in favour of China. As of now, China is an active partner of every activity initiated by ARF. China has discussed almost every security issue including territorial issue of Spratly Islands, either on the forum or on its sidelines. But Taiwan is an exception to this phenomenon. China is very clear in its articulation that it would not entertain any discussion on Taiwan. ASEAN countries have also accepted this demand. They act as if Taiwan does not exist for them.

Southeast Asia found importance in Chinese vision earlier than Central Asia. Though Central Asia is the region where China is trying to assume a lead role through SCO, it is Southeast Asia where it first made an attempt to test its vision. China's engagement with Central Asia is primarily security-strategic, whereas its engagement
in Southeast Asia is essentially in the field of economy. China's purpose to engage with Southeast Asia was to prove that its rise was peaceful and it would not pose any threat to the region. In fact in this region it wanted to build its soft power and gain goodwill of the countries of the region through promoting mutual interests.

To a great extent, China has fulfilled its vision, a process which has been made easy as the region is very receptive to China. This region, in fact, has become a 'partner in competition' and is ready to share and ensure mutual growth and prosperity. China's active pursuance has changed the region's perception. Within the region, there are very few serious takers of the view that China's rise is a necessary threat to the region. China's strategic success lies in the fact that it has ensured that the region is no longer under the sole influence of the US. Both sides have built a great amount of mutual confidence. And this explicitly displays the fact that China has been increasing its engagement and involvement with ASEAN and ARF.

As far as China's relations with SCO are concerned, they present an entirely different model. SCO emerged when China appeared much confident and had started engaging the world much more aggressively. As has been mentioned in other contexts, SCO is the only organisation in whose creation China played a leading and guiding role. In SCO, it sets the rules of the game, whereas in ARF, it follows the terms set by ASEAN, though the terms set by ASEAN factor the issues that China is concerned about.

China is achieving its twin purposes vis-à-vis SCO and ARF. On the one hand, its engagement with both the organisations points out its grand strategy of stabilizing its peripheries and carving out its zones of influence, and on the other hand, it is dealing with immediate and short-term security concerns. Its participation in ARF ensures counterbalancing US and isolating Taiwan, whereas SCO provides such a platform which it can use jointly with Russia to counterbalance US besides being a buffer between volatile Afghanistan and China.

The differences between China's experiences in both the organisations and regions are influenced by two distinct factors – regional independence and international power politics being played out in the regions. In dealing with the ASEAN countries, China endeavours to identify with the common Confucian culture,
while in dealing with Central Asia and SCO its response is primarily shaped by power politics taking place among the great powers, regional actors and non-state actors.

China's positive understanding about regional order in the 1990s paved way for multilateralism. China's strategy for regional order is aimed at serving its economic interests, consolidating its peripheries, and deepening its presence in the regions. China's strategy towards its peripheries is directly linked with its desirable Asian regional order. Consolidation of its rise and consequent prospects of Sino-US rivalry; concerns about regional flashpoints like Korea, Taiwan, Kashmir and the Spratly Islands dispute; improved bilateral relationship with all neighboring states; more active participation in multilateral security and economic arrangements with cautious initiation of new forms of regional economic cooperation figure in this strategy. After 9/11, the US has increased its engagement in both Southeast and Central Asia. Thus, China's participation in SCO and ARF facilitates its grand strategy.

In both organisations China has shown remarkable maturity. In the case of ARF, it reciprocated positively and has not come in the way of integration process of ASEAN whereas in the case of SCO, it has played a lead role. Both examples demonstrate how China has repositioned itself according to international scenario, and throw light upon the current evolution of China's international socialization. China's position on these organisations is very clear and positive. China wants a multipolar world. In its vision, world is full of diversity and the emergence of a multipolar world is a natural process. World is bound to become multipolar sooner or later. Earlier, China had negative opinion about multilateral forums; however, it later changed its position and started considering multilateralism as a realizable proposition for multipolar world.

Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence are central to China's foreign policy articulation. From late 1980s onwards, China renewed its emphasis on Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China's New Security Concept can be viewed as an application of these Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence to the security realm. China's foreign policy articulation has been advocating that the global system should be based on Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China has raised this demand from the platform of ARF also, and to the credit of China the Five Principles form part of various declarations and charters of SCO.

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China's Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, its emphasis on the UN system, regionalism, multilateralism, and new security concept, together constitute its grand strategy of ensuring its place in international order. This strategy pursues a normative agenda of democratization of international relations. It does not remain confined to economic realm alone. China's emphasis is that governing norms of international behaviour enshrined in the UN charter should become the basis of international politics. This emphasis is in conjunction with its 'foreign policy of peace'. China believes that present international order comprises such institutional mechanisms that the states, irrespective of their ideologies, can expect fair share in the system. China's participation in both ARF and SCO has been shaped by these principles. In case of both SCQ and ARF, guiding imperatives for China's engagement are its national interests, and conviction that ultimately such groupings would lead towards multipolar world. Therefore, China uses them in stabilizing and consolidating its peripheries at western and eastern borders through 'Panchsheel' or Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence.

6.10 Summary

SCO and ARF represent two different stages and kinds of regional integration. ARF is at an advanced stage of regional integration in comparison to SCO. SCO still needs some time to be a matured and independent organisation in asserting its regional identity as ARF has been for sometime. Large number of ARF participants and their freedom from superpower influence make it much more open, whereas the primary task for SCO lies in doing away with charges that it is a handiwork of China and Russia.