

Restore the Silk Road

Last September when he delivered a speech at a university in Kazakhstan, Chinese President Xi Jinping raised the suggestion that China and Central Asian countries should work together to build the Silk Road Economic Belt. The proposal was met with immediate resonance among neighboring countries and received a warm reception. Some provinces in the western region of China have even begun preparing to participate in the new round of cross-border economic cooperation.

Undoubtedly, the Silk Road Economic Belt will benefit all parties including China and her Central Asian partners. The mutual-benefit economic zone will help accelerate the development of China's remote northwest regions and also facilitate China's international cooperation with Central Asian countries.

For both China and Central Asia, the Silk Road played an important role in creating marvelous civilizations and economic prosperity in ancient times. Around 2,000 years ago, a Chinese emperor of the Han Dynasty sent his envoy, Zhang Qian, to the unknown west in search of allies to resist the threat of northern nomads. Unexpectedly, Zhang's journey pioneered a significant bond between China and Central Asia. Since then, a trade road linking China and Central Asia—even stretching as far as Europe—formed and countries along the road thrived. The historic Silk Road was the world's longest trade route on land.

Although the ancient Silk Road was eventually replaced by shipping routes via sea, China and Central Asian countries have great incentive to revive the historic link under the spirit of cooperation and mutual benefit. Today, China is the largest trade partner of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as well as the largest investor in Uzbekistan.

Compared with 2,000 years ago, current modes of transportation between China and Central Asian countries are far more swift and convenient. The railway from China to Central Asian countries is the major trunk of a new Eurasian Land Bridge. China's expressway joins Europe's E40 road through Central Asia. China has also opened flights to major Central Asian cities including Almaty, Tashkent and Dushanbe. Furthermore, China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region features 12 land ports along the border with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

A comprehensive transport network across China and Central Asian countries, including railways, roads and air travel has now been established. The revival of the Silk Road can be expected soon.

(retrieved 07.05.2014 at http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2014-03/24/content_608631.htm#)