

FEATURES OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN DIRECTION OF JAPAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Within the framework of the foreign policy strategy and the main areas of cooperation, it is considered important to examine the relations between Japan and the Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. In this article, we will consider the importance of Central Asia in Japanese politics, how and when Japan established its first relations with the countries of the region, as well as what areas of cooperation are the main focus of the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialogue.

Undoubtedly, the entire Central Asian region is of particular importance in the global geopolitical space, given the subsoil rich in minerals, and other elements, the unique geographical location, which can be not only a positive, but also a negative factor, as well as the potential for development and cooperation. In this regard, global powers periodically pay attention to this direction, strengthening economic and political ties. In addition, the geopolitical location of the region is important in terms of the regional security issues such as terrorism, illegal distribution of narcotic drugs, and illegal migration. For Japan, the region is particularly attractive because of the huge number of opportunities in the field of logistics and transport, natural disaster prevention, infrastructure, natural resources and water sources. In this regard, Japan is resolutely strengthening bilateral relations, implementing initiative projects, creating forums for solving particularly important problems and generally supporting the development of the region. Within the framework of the bilateral relations “Japan – Central Asia”, the dialogue “Central Asia plus Japan” was formed [1, p.138-140].

About twenty-nine years have passed since Japan recognized the sovereignty of Central Asian countries and established diplomatic relations. This was the period when the post-soviet republics began an independent development process. In 1992, Japan established diplomatic relations with the countries of Central Asia, which will be further strengthened and improved within the framework of the regional structure. The “Central Asia plus Japan” dialogue was launched in 2004, but until then the countries had initiated a number of meetings in the format of international conferences, the main theme of which was the development of the potential of Central Asia. In 1992, Japan held one of these conferences in Tokyo on the promotion of Newly Independent States (NIS), where the issues of humanitarian assistance, technical assistance, etc. were discussed [2, p. 4].

Further, in 1999, the project “Challenge 2001 – Japan’s Foreign Policy towards the 21st Century” was first presented, which thoroughly analyzes Japan’s foreign policy and its challenges for the coming decade [3]. Later in 2002, Central Asia and the Caspian Sea countries were included in the Official development assistance (ODA) priority list, which made cooperation between Japan and Central Asia more profound [2, p. 4].

Japan’s diplomacy contains two main vectors aimed at successful cooperation with Central Asia:

1. Strengthening of bilateral ties;

2. Strengthening regional cooperation to solve common problems through the implementation of the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialogue [1, p. 138].

In general, considering the historical relationship and stages of development, we can safely distinguish five periods, starting from 1992:

1) From 1992 to 1997. During this period, the Central Asian countries established diplomatic relations with Japan, the first diplomatic missions were established, and the first ambassadors were appointed. Japan, in turn, is beginning to view the region in its own geopolitical interests, providing ODA.

2) From 1997 to 2001. Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto formulated the so-called strategy of Eurasian Diplomacy. In his speech, he mentioned the vast region that encompasses the Russian Federation, China, and the Silk Road region, encompassing the Central Asian Republics of the former Soviet Union and the countries of the Caucasus region. He called this part of his presentation “Enthusiastically developing Eurasian diplomacy” [4] in which he outlined several important points that accompany the development of bilateral and multilateral relations:

- Eurasian diplomacy also plays an important role in shaping a stable and secure Japan and the Asia-Pacific region;

- the initial contribution to the Central Asian region will have successful results in the future, as a result of which Japan will seek to strengthen ties with Central Asia, Russia and China;

- the region is rich in mineral resources, including oil and gas fields, which is one of the priorities in the formation of foreign policy;

- in the region of Eurasian diplomacy, the potential for building communications between neighboring regions is becoming a positive element [5, p. 60].

In 1998, Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi proposed a new Silk Road plan, which formed a strategy aimed at developing relations with Central Asia. In 1997, the Asian Development Bank successfully implemented one of the projects funded by Japan – the Central Asian Region Economic Cooperation program. Japan was at the top of the list of donors and assistance providers.

3) From 2001 to 2009. This period is characterized by the strengthening of the global security system, which failed after the events of September 11, 2001. In 2004, under the cabinet of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, Yoriko Kawaguchi put forward the idea of forming a dialogue “Central Asia plus Japan”, which still remains an actual platform for solving major issues and developing cooperation in a regional format. During the first visit to Central Asia by a foreign minister, Kawaguchi defined Japan’s new multilateral foreign policy. This idea became real thanks to the current President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who in 2004 held the important post of Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Further 2005 and 2006 showed different diplomatic focuses of activity on the part of Koizumi and Abe. Their administrations came up with a new term, the concept of the Arch of Freedom and Prosperity, which would strengthen democratic values in the regions of the Middle East, Central Asia, and the Caucasus.

4) From 2009 to 2012. During this period, the leaders of Japan were representatives of the Democratic Party, who abandoned the concept of the Arch of Freedom and Prosperity, invented by past administrations. Despite this significant shift in interests, the Prime Ministers of the Democratic Party of Japan focused their policies on resource diplomacy, which included mineral exploration in order to expand Japanese infrastructure and promote it to the Central Asian region.

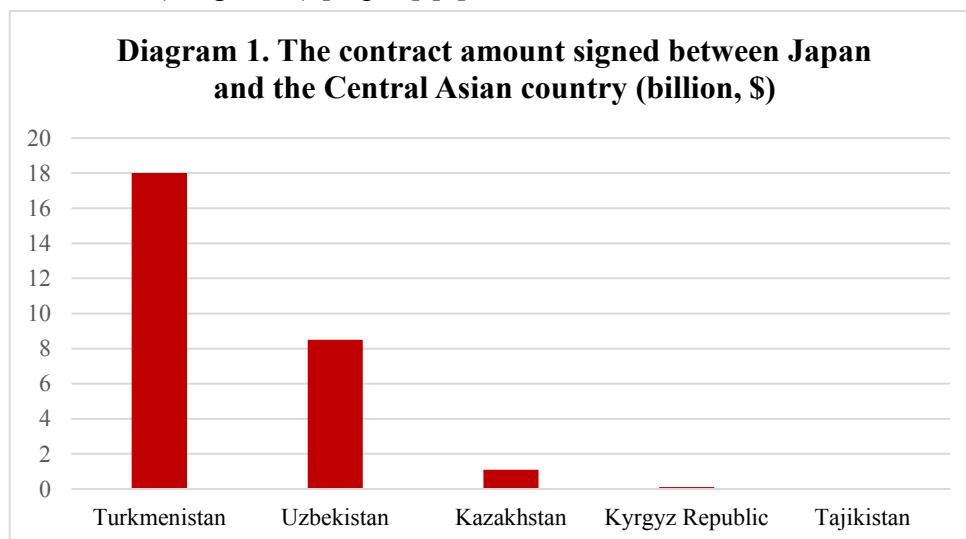
5) From 2012 to the present. Since 2012, the policy has been changed again by the Cabinet of Shinzo Abe, who has long promoted cooperation in the business sphere, tempered the diplomacy of values, and conducted negotiations to strengthen bilateral ties. It was during this period that the Ministers of Economy, Trade and Industry managed to attend the meeting in Central Asia [6, p. 15].

In his book “Towards a beautiful country” Shinzo Abe considers the position of the Central Asian region in his policy as strategically important [7].

In October 2015, Shinzo Abe made a series of visits to five Central Asian countries, which was the first ever trip of the Prime Minister of Japan, which affected all the republics, as well as the second ever visit to this region after Koizumi Junichiro. Giving this event such a symbolic significance showed Japan’s serious intentions to develop bilateral cooperation for 4 purposes:

- economic interest: ensuring sustainable cooperation in the business industry;
- increasing the role of Japanese business companies in the Central Asian region;
- humanitarian forces that are aimed at strengthening the security system in the region;
- socio-cultural influence that is exerted through the policy of “soft power” [5, p. 61].

For Japan, the pressure side was China, which in turn is beginning to effectively invest and equip Central Asia with financial resources, according to its “One Belt One Road” strategy, which is a new analogy of the Silk Road. In this competition for cooperation with Central Asia, Japan is strongly retreating, as a result of which the island state decides to increase monetary contracts with the Central Asian republics. Abe’s trip in 2015 Central Asia brought a certain amount of results: the signed contracts for economic cooperation, in particular for stimulating Japanese exports, provided about \$28 billion in total (Diagram 1) [6, p15] [8].



In addition to the contracts signed by the parties, one of the tools for maintaining economic bilateral relations to this day remains the ODA from Japan. The ODA directed to Central Asia promotes regional development in various formats: on the one hand, it is credit assistance, grant assistance, as well as cooperation in technical areas. The amount of ODA varies depending on the country, as is noticeable with contract amounts (Table 1), the level of availability of natural resources, production opportunities and labor potential.

Table 1. Japan’s Official Development Assistance to Central Asian countries (as of 2018 year):

	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyz Republic	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan
Loans	95.100 billion yen	37.600 billion yen	4.500 billion yen	276.600 billion yen	N\A
Grants	6.381 billion yen	30.076 billion yen	643 million yen	26.629 billion yen	36.00 billion yen
Technical cooperation	13.509 billion yen	17.899 billion yen	1.224 billion yen	18.231 billion yen	8.476 billion yen

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan [9]

Among the 5 republics in foreign policy, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are particularly distinguished, which are important political and economic players for Japan due to their strategically convenient location and neighbors. Thus, Kazakhstan is a neighbor of Russia, China and the three Central Asian republics, and also having a border with the Caspian Sea. Uzbekistan as the only country that has border lines with all the countries of Central Asia.

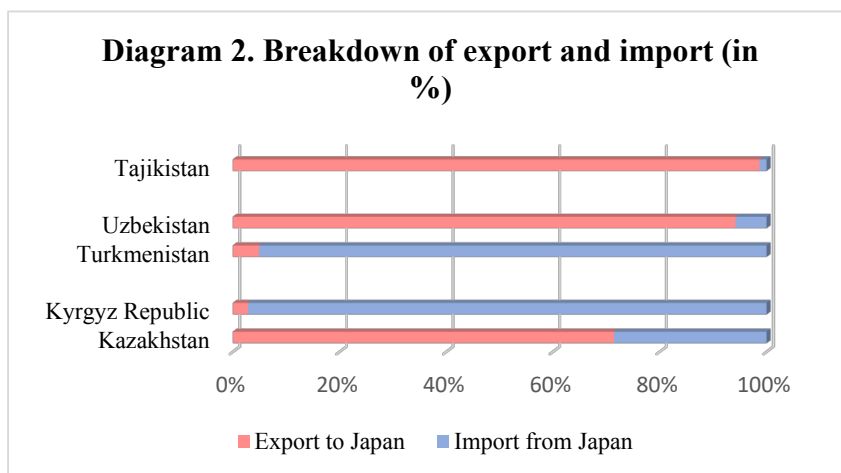
In addition to the geographical factor, Japan has repeatedly noted the contribution of countries to the development of not only the regional space, but also the success in national unification, the desire to modernize and improve existing systems.

As for “soft power”, the Japanese authorities have successfully promoted projects that have helped in the construction of roads, educational institutions, health care and other infrastructure, improving the education system and introducing Japanese culture to the masses in general, thanks to which Japan continues to be highly appreciated in spreading a positive image of the state [10].

It is important to note that during Shinzo Abe’s premiership, his cabinet was most open to such trips, which allowed the ministers of economy, trade and industry, and finance ministers to actively cooperate with the Central Asian side.

To date, the Central Asia plus Japan dialogue format has managed to form and expand its structure, including meetings of the participating countries at the level of foreign ministers, representatives of countries, representatives of business and economic structures. Despite the fact that the dialogue officially began its work in 2004, the first meeting, which was attended by all the participating countries, took place only 10 years later, in 2014, at the fifth meeting of foreign ministers. The countries continue to work confidently in the areas of infrastructure development and construction, tourism, logistics and transport communications, investment expansion and ensuring regional security. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Japan has been introducing itself to the development of transport and logistics in Central Asia. In 2017, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida announced new projects that were planned to be deployed in Turkmenistan. Japan has allocated about 24 billion yen for the implementation of the transport project.

As already noted, investment agreements are one of the tools for implementing foreign policy, as a result of which Japan intends to increase the number and contracts total amounts. At the moment, only Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have such agreements with Japan [11]. The other economic side is the share of exports and imports in cooperation with Japan. The main component of exports to Japan from Central Asian countries remains oil and gas, agricultural products and, if we talk about Uzbekistan, automobile spare parts and parts (Diagram 2) [12].



In May 2019, Dushanbe hosted the seventh meeting of foreign ministers within the framework of the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialogue, where they discussed issues of tourism, trade, transport, investment, and regional security [13]. Such meetings not only support the importance of the region in Japanese politics, but also confirm the success of Eurasian diplomacy, namely the direction of Central Asia.

Summing up, despite the non-priority direction of foreign policy activities, cooperation between Central Asia and Japan can be assessed as favorable and steadily developing. Japan is actively involved in the development of the Central Asian region, along with countries such as China, the United States, and Russia. The country continues to remain on the list of countries by the ODA sent to Central Asia. Eurasian diplomacy, that was announced back in 1997, still performs strategic tasks in the Central Asian region, along with cooperation with China and Russia. Positive economic results

were achieved in terms of exports and imports, in terms of the number of ODAs, and Japan continues to develop its position within the Central Asian countries. After the departure of Shinzo Abe, policies and views towards the region are unlikely to change, but will only gain more effectiveness and influence in order to get ahead of the Chinese forces to enter Central Asia.

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