

JAPAN'S POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.20.1.04>

Sergey ZHILTSOV

*D.Sc. (Political Science),
Head of the Department of Political Science and Political Philosophy,
Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia;
Professor, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia;
Research Fellow, S.Yu. Witte Moscow University
(Moscow, Russian Federation)*

ABSTRACT

After the breakup of the U.S.S.R., Japan began developing and implementing its foreign policy towards Central Asia (CA). Japan's attention to countries in the region was determined by its long-term economic and political interests. First and foremost, Japan was interested in gaining access to the assets of CA countries: their

fuel and energy complex and mineral deposits. The need to address this problem was dictated by the country's limited natural resources and its heavy dependence on hydrocarbon imports. Accordingly, Japanese policy was aimed to gain unimpeded access to the hydrocarbon resources of CA countries and create reliable export routes for oil and gas in the interests of its own economy. This is why the creation of alternative pipeline routes for transporting oil and gas from Central Asia was a key goal for Japan. But its achievement was hindered by Central Asia's geographical remoteness. As a result, Japan lost out to China, which borders on CA countries. Nevertheless, Japan proposed a number of pipeline projects that should have given it access to Central Asian resources, mainly through Chinese territory.

Japan tried to create multilateral formats of cooperation with CA countries by launching various initiatives. But Tokyo's efforts failed to produce a positive result in

view of the disunity and heterogeneity of countries in the region, which did not constitute a single geopolitical unit. Domestic political processes in the CA countries developed differently as they faced a set of economic and social problems. As a result, Japan built its policy regarding the Central Asian countries mainly on a bilateral basis. Of particular interest to Japan were Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, which have significant oil and gas reserves.

Although Japan's long-term goals have practically not changed over time, its Central Asia policy can be divided into several stages, each of which has its own specific features determined by the development of the geopolitical situation in Central Asia, the influence of other extra-regional states on countries in the region, and the interests of the Central Asian countries. In recent years, Japan has actively implemented its policy by expanding bilateral cooperation while retaining an interest in multilateral cooperation formats.

KEYWORDS: Japan, Central Asia, EU, the U.S., Russia, energy, hydrocarbon resources, pipelines.

Introduction

Japan's policy in Central Asia, like that of other extra-regional states, began after the breakup of the U.S.S.R., although even before that, in October 1991, Japan decided to provide \$2.5 billion worth of grants to the post-Soviet countries.¹

After gaining independence, the former Soviet republics were subjected to the massive influence of various external actors such as the United States, Turkey, Iran, South Korea, China, and Japan.² But, in contrast to other countries, Tokyo's policy was restrained and, in a way, ambiguous. On the one hand, Japan showed a heightened interest in Central Asian energy resources. Given its technologies and financial capacity, the shortage of raw materials created the conditions for Tokyo's active participation in the development of Central Asian economies.³ Japan also hoped to expand its

¹ See: F.P. Urazayeva, "Otnosheniya Yaponii so stranami Tsentralnoi Azii," *Voprosy natsionalnykh i federativnykh otnosheni*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 180-188.

² See: K. Darabi, Sh. Nabati, "Vneshniaia politika Kitaia v Tsentralnoi Azii v perekhodnoi ere," *The Caspian Region: Politics, Economics, Culture*, No. 3, 2018, pp. 109-119.

³ See: M.Yu. Igitian, "Geopoliticheskaia strategii vedushchikh i regionalnykh gosudarstv v Tsentralnoi Azii," *Etnotsium i mezhnatsionalnaia kultura*, No. 12, 2017, pp. 163-175.

economic presence in Central Asia. In 1992, for example, Japan's Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe visited Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. There were also plans to provide economic assistance to other CA countries. Japan's efforts in this area were spurred by the active policy of China, which sought to gain a dominant position in the CA countries. Japan was also attracted by the natural resources of these countries. On the other hand, its policy was passive because of the geographical remoteness of Central Asia and its poor exploration. Accordingly, Japan opened only two embassies in the region: in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The combination of caution in expanding into Central Asia and a desire to assert the Japanese presence in the region has led to a situation where Tokyo's policy has been marked by periods of heightened activity and interest alternating with long periods of "political slack."

The Desire for Central Asian Hydrocarbons

The lack of a clear vision of its policy in Central Asia, whose countries had just gained independence, did not prevent Japan from going after the region's hydrocarbon resources or joining the debate on export pipeline projects, especially since the United States, the EU, and China were among the competitors in the pipeline race.⁴

One of the projects developed and discussed back in 1992 was the Turkmenistan-China-Japan gas pipeline, an 8,000 km-long mega pipeline with a capacity of 30 bcm of gas per year. Initially, the pipeline was designed by the China Petroleum Engineering & Construction Corporation (CPECC), which was later joined by Mitsubishi Corporation (Japan) and Exxon (U.S.), whose management believed that transportation of gas from Turkmenistan to Southeast Asia was a safer and more profitable option than gas supplies from Siberia. The pipeline was to have become part of the extensive gas pipeline network linking Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan with users in China, South Korea, and Japan.⁵ At that time, the Turkmenistan-Western China-Japan pipeline project, like other large-scale projects, was deemed unprofitable because of low global gas prices in that period and the high cost of the project (about \$9 billion). As a result, work on the project was suspended. At the same time, the problem of gaining access to hydrocarbon resources continued to be a focus of Japanese policy. For example, a white paper on energy policy issued in 1993 emphasized the importance of oil and gas resources, including those located in Central Asia. In March 1993, it was announced that the Japan National Oil Corporation was ready to launch a full-fledged feasibility study for the commercial production of oil and gas in Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan.⁶

Japan has long been interested in gas transportation routes from different parts of the former Soviet Union. At a conference called Perspectives of Eurasia as a Field of Global Communication in 1993, the National Pipeline Research Society of Japan (established in 1989) presented its conclusions and proposals for the construction of a Trans-Asia Gas Pipeline. This document considered, among many other options of international pipeline routes, a gas pipeline route called Northeast Asia and North Pacific. The Turkmenistan-Western China-Japan gas pipeline was conceived as part of this route.

However, Japan's plans were not implemented in practice. The development of new gas pipelines in the eastern direction was associated with the hydrocarbon resources of Kazakhstan and Turkmeni-

⁴ See: *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. M. Hafeez, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1994, 337 pp.

⁵ See: I.S. Zonn, "Veliki Sholkovyi put stanovitsia velikim neftegazovym putem," *Problemy postsovetskogo prostranstva*, No. 2, 2015, pp. 34-44.

⁶ See: O.A. Dobrinskaya, "Energeticheskaia diplomatiia Yaponii i Tsentralnaia Azia," *Ezhgodnik Yaponia*, No. 40, 2011, pp. 38-51.

stan. One of the potential users of natural gas from the Caspian countries was China, which had followed an active policy towards Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from the beginning of the 1990s.⁷ Moreover, in the first half of the 1990s the Central Asian countries were a target of China's trade and economic expansion because of their economic and political weakness. The uncontrolled development of trade relations allowed China to tap the raw material, mineral, and human resources of these countries.

Tokyo took into account the desire of Central Asian countries to develop economic relations with Japan. Kazakhstan, for example, considered the possibility of expanding the geography of oil supplies towards China and then on to Japan. At the same time, Central Asia was of no interest to Japan as a market for its goods because of its small population, while the transfer of production to Central Asia did not make economic sense for Japanese companies considering its remoteness from export markets and its underdeveloped infrastructure. Nevertheless, the Japanese side was in favor of developing economic relations with the CA countries.⁸ It focused on Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Apart from political stability, these countries attracted Tokyo by their natural resources. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were of less interest to Japan. In the early 1990s, Tajikistan was the scene of intense political struggle. In Kyrgyzstan, which positioned itself as an "island of democracy" in the region, the political elites of the north and south of the country were also locked in a fierce battle for power.

Tokyo's efforts to expand trade and economic relations with the CA countries were spurred by China's intensified Central Asia policy, which underwent a change in the second half of the 1990s. Beijing focused its efforts on the further development of economic relations, backing them by geopolitical considerations. These policy changes were caused by the intensifying competition for the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian region and routes for their delivery to foreign markets. China was interested in preventing the CA countries from coming under the influence or control of states that could pursue an unfriendly policy towards it.

A primary task of Chinese policy in that situation was to prevent the establishment of any political, let alone military, alliances or organizations directed against China. In addition, China was obliged to take into account the appearance of military bases in Central Asia. Their deployment changed the geopolitical situation in the region. There was concern in Beijing that, in the event of tensions in Sino-American relations, the CA countries could turn into a springboard for attacks against China. Given the growing role of hydrocarbons in the Chinese economy, Beijing was faced with the task of ensuring guaranteed access to these resources.

As a result, Japan reviewed and adjusted its approaches to the CA countries. In 1995, for example, Tokyo granted preferential treatment to Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which made it possible to increase the supply of mineral resources to Japan.⁹

New Initiatives

Despite China's leadership in expanding its presence in Central Asia, Japan did not abandon its plans to strengthen ties with the CA countries. Relations between the main external forces were strained,¹⁰ which compelled them to launch various initiatives in order to strengthen their positions in

⁷ See: S.S. Zhiltsov, I.S. Zonn, *Kaspiiskaia truboprovodnaia geopolitika*, Vostok-Zapad, Moscow, 2011, 320 pp.

⁸ See: D.A. Mileev, "Vneshniaia politika Yaponii v Tsentralnoi Azii," in: *Strany SNG v sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* (collected articles), Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, 2008, pp. 523-543.

⁹ See: E.A. Gavrilina, "Prioritety vneshnei politiki Yaponii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii na sovremennom etape," *Armiia i obshchestvo*, No. 2, 2012, pp. 120-125.

¹⁰ See: V.V. Yevseev, "Tsentralnaia Azia: igra na protivorechiakh osnovnykh vneshnepoliticheskikh igrokov," *Vostok, Afro-aziatskie obshchestva: istoria i sovremennost*, No. 4, 2013, pp. 70-83.

Central Asia. It was partly for this reason that Japan's foreign policy strategy towards Central Asia was conceptualized in 1997.¹¹ For example, Japan's Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto launched his Eurasian (Silk Road) Diplomacy initiative. The idea behind it was to expand political dialog and economic relations, promote democracy, and develop natural resources in CA countries. The final provision of this initiative was of particular interest to Tokyo, because Japan was badly in need of alternative suppliers of natural resources.

In 1997-1998, the region was visited by numerous Japanese delegations, which discussed issues of economic cooperation and wider participation in oil and gas development projects. In March 1998, Japan presented its Silk Road Action Plan, which addressed issues of politics, economics, and stability. But economic interests related to ensuring Japan's energy security were at the root of the document. Japan's long-term plans included the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in Central Asia and the Caspian and their safe delivery to the global market and directly to Japan.¹²

Considering the difficulties in implementing energy projects, Japan adjusted its policy in Central Asia, focusing attention on trade and economic cooperation. In the first decade after the breakup of the U.S.S.R., it provided economic assistance to Central Asian countries. In 1992-2000, this assistance amounted to \$1 billion, with most of it going to three countries: Uzbekistan (\$396 million), Kazakhstan (\$306 million), and Kyrgyzstan (\$290 million). They were granted soft loans for modernizing their transport infrastructure.¹³ It should be noted that Japan viewed this assistance as an important tool in promoting its long-term interests: projecting a positive image of the country in Central Asia and establishing stable economic relations.

Overall, Japanese policy in the region began to change in the early 2000s. Tokyo opened embassies in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan. Trade and economic cooperation with Uzbekistan was expanded, which allowed the two countries to announce a strategic partnership in 2002.

Japan's increased activity in the region was associated with the Chinese and U.S. expansion into Central Asia. The EU was also active in the region, while Russia continued to exert a strong influence in Central Asia, since the region was of considerable interest to it. Japan sought to strengthen its position in the CA countries, particularly in the energy sector. In 2002, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced plans to develop energy cooperation with Central Asia.¹⁴

Moving Towards Multilateral Formats

In 2004, Japan proposed a new framework for cooperation known as the Central Asia plus Japan Dialog, for the first time putting forward the idea of cooperation in a multilateral format. In contrast to the Hashimoto doctrine, the new initiative was directed only towards the Central Asian countries.¹⁵

That event coincided with China's increased activity in Central Asia as Beijing began to implement its energy projects in the region, primarily seeking to step up the discussion and subsequent

¹¹ See: O.Ya. Dobrinskaya, "Yaponia-Tsentrlnaia Aziya: v poiskakh nefi i statusa," *Azia i Afrika segodnia*, No. 8, 2011, pp. 45-50.

¹² See: EA. Borodin, "Ofitsialnaia pomoshch razvitiu kak osnova razvitiia otnoshenii Yaponii so stranami Tsentrlnoi Azii," *Kazanskaia nauka*, No. 4, 2013, pp. 15-19.

¹³ See: EF. Troitsky, M.Yu. Kim, "Politika Yaponii v Tsentrlnoi Azii (1992-2016)," *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Istorica*, No. 50, 2017, pp. 84-88.

¹⁴ See: O.A. Dobrinskaya, "Energeticheskaia diplomatia Yaponii i Tsentrlnaia Azia."

¹⁵ See: O.Ya. Dobrinskaya, "Yaponia-Tsentrlnaia Azia: v poiskakh nefi i statusa."

construction of the Turkmenistan-China gas pipeline. In that period, the CA countries were also being drawn into Russian integration projects, some of which involved China. For example, Russia promoted the project of the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) and, jointly with Beijing, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The Central Asian countries took an active part in both projects. Accordingly, Japan believed that the new format would help to contain the aspirations of Russia and China.

The format suggested by Japan was approved by all CA countries except Turkmenistan, which in that period was reorienting its foreign policy to China. In August 2004, the foreign ministers of four CA countries (without Turkmenistan) and Japan met for the first time in Astana (Kazakhstan). The Japanese side focused attention on the need to develop the multilateral framework for cooperation in Central Asia, emphasizing that its goals were long-term. These ideas were elaborated in 2006, at the second foreign ministers' meeting in Tokyo in the Central Asia plus Japan format. The meeting adopted an Action Plan that provided for the development of political dialog along with economic cooperation.

Japan's efforts were aimed at addressing a number of key problems, primarily that of ensuring energy security. It was planned to achieve this by gaining access to the energy resources of Central Asian countries. It is no accident that in 2006 Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry developed a national energy strategy that emphasized the need to expand ties with countries rich in energy resources.¹⁶

In that period, Tokyo paid increasing attention to hydrocarbon resources. This was partly due to high global energy prices, which sharply increased the profitability of hydrocarbon production and stimulated investment, including from Japan, in the production and transportation of hydrocarbons.¹⁷ Thus, Japan saw the need to diversify its energy sources.¹⁸

Japan did not rule out the possibility of participating in the Turkmenistan-Western China gas pipeline project, which could be extended to reach Japan. By that time, however, the situation had changed. In 2003-2005, Chinese companies conducted exploration works on the right bank of the Amu Darya River in Turkmenistan, confirming the existence of promising gas fields in this area.¹⁹ Besides, China was in need of significant amounts of additional hydrocarbons, so that it was less interested in extending the gas pipeline to Japan.

Along with addressing issues related to hydrocarbon development and exports from the region, Tokyo was concerned about the strengthening positions of Russia and China, which had managed to build their own models of cooperation with the Central Asian countries.

In August 2006, the Japanese Prime Minister paid a visit to CA countries, which showed the region's increasing role in Japanese policy. That same year, Japan's policy was supplemented with the concept called Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. The new initiative of Japanese diplomacy was designed to promote universal values: freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.²⁰ Such ideas did not find support in the CA countries, which formally supported the course for expanding and introducing democratic procedures and principles, but in practice followed traditional approaches specific to Central Asian societies.

¹⁶ See: M. Nurgaliev, T. Shaymergenov, "Japanese Diplomacy Makes New Headway in Central Asia: Its Problems, Expectations, and Prospects," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (48), 2007, pp. 125-135.

¹⁷ See: I. Tomberg, "Central Asia and the Caspian: A New Stage in the Great Energy Game," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (41), 2006, pp. 20-34.

¹⁸ See: G.N. Kim, "Interesy stran ATR na Kaspii," in: *Tsentrlnaya Aziya i Kaspiiski region: riski, vyzovy, ugrozy*, ed. B.K. Sultanov, KISI, Almaty, 2012, p. 170.

¹⁹ See: K.L. Syroyezhkin, *Kazakhstan-Kitai: ot prigranichnoi torgovli k strategicheskomu partnerstvu*, Vol. 2, KISI, Almaty, 2010, p. 117.

²⁰ See: G. Ismayilzada, "A New Pillar of Japanese Foreign Policy: The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity—Japanese Policy Toward the Guam Organization," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3-4 (51-52), 2008, pp. 196-202.

The Japanese initiative had little effect on the positions of countries in the region, primarily because of their disunity and serious contradictions in the sphere of water and energy. In addition, the cooperation format suggested by Japan was not supported by specific large-scale projects, as in the case of China.

Nevertheless, Japan continued to focus on expanding cooperation with CA countries in the development of resources, particularly in the joint development of uranium deposits in Kazakhstan and oil and gas deposits in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The third foreign ministers' meeting in 2010 was attended by Turkmenistan, which was faced with the ever more urgent task of diversifying both political and economic contacts. Despite the efforts of Japanese diplomacy, the proposed format ("5+1") did nothing either to promote Japan's interests or to advance the development of Central Asia. Economic relations between countries in the region remained at a low level, while the expansion of political contacts was hindered by mutual claims and unresolved conflicts, including in the water and energy sector. For this reason, Japan built its relations with the CA countries on a bilateral basis. This situation suited the CA countries, which were able to attract Japanese investments and technologies. Besides, Japan did not criticize them for violations of human rights while implementing investment projects and providing assistance. In 2001-2015, the total amount of Japanese economic aid to countries in the region reached \$1.6 billion. As before, its main recipients were Uzbekistan (\$609 million), Kazakhstan (\$444 million), and Kyrgyzstan (\$295 million).²¹

Despite Japan's heightened activity and its desire to achieve concrete results, its actual involvement in the affairs of CA countries remained quite modest. The influence of Japanese diplomacy was limited because of objective factors, geographical remoteness, and a low level of economic cooperation compared to China and Russia, especially since Japan's leaders realized that in the following decade Central Asia would be strongly influenced by Chinese and Russian interests.²²

In 2014, following in the wake of U.S. policy, Japan organized a ministerial meeting that was attended by the foreign ministers of all five CA countries. The Joint Statement adopted at the meeting was designed to contain Beijing's ambitions in the region.²³ But the Statement had no effect on China's relations with the CA countries, because by that time it had gained a strong foothold in their economies, implementing large-scale infrastructure projects and providing significant loans. In particular, China promoted its interests through the Belt and Road infrastructure project, which naturally caused concern among other extra-regional states.²⁴

Banking on the Economy

Japanese policy in Central Asia was given a new boost in 2015, when Prime Minister Shinzo Abe visited all five CA countries, signing \$27 billion worth of agreements. Tokyo's activity in the Central Asian region was characterized not so much by big initiatives as by the gradual development of practical projects, primarily of economic interest.²⁵

²¹ See: EF. Troitsky, M.Yu. Kim, op. cit.

²² See: Ya.O. Zakhariev, "Yaponia v Tsentralnoi Azii v nachale XXI veka: izuchenie problemy ekonomicheskogo vlianiia kitaiskimi spetsialistami," *Ekonomika Tsentralnoi Azii*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2017, pp. 11-18.

²³ See: Ibidem.

²⁴ See: M. Glyants, "Kitaiskaia initsiativa 'Odin poias—odin put': chto mozhnet sdelat brend," *Problemy postsovetkogo prostranstva*, No. 1, 2017, pp. 8-19.

²⁵ See: N. Murashkin, I. Akylbaev, "Yaponia i Tsentralnaia Azia. 'Tikhoye' partnerstvo s privlecheniem vneregionalnykh igrokov," 20 June, 2017, available at: [<https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/yaponiya-i-tsentralnaya-aziya-tikhoe-partnerstvo-s-privlecheniem-vneregionalnykh-igrokov/>], 8 November, 2019.

In particular, the Japanese Prime Minister visited Turkmenistan, where the parties signed agreements totaling \$18 billion²⁶ related to cooperation in the energy sector, primarily investments by Japanese companies in the development of the Galkynysh gas field.²⁷ Agreements on the implementation of joint investment projects were also reached during meetings with the President of Uzbekistan. They were concerned with the automotive industry, telecommunications, transport, and energy. Japan planned to invest in the development of new hydrocarbon deposits. Uzbekistan, in turn, was interested in attracting Japanese investment, which would also enable it to obtain new technologies.

Tokyo's activity took place as other states expanded their efforts in the region, proposing their own multilateral cooperation formats to the CA countries. In October-November 2015, the U.S. Secretary of State paid a visit to Central Asia, where he toured all five countries in the region. During his visit to Samarkand (Uzbekistan), he met for the first time with the five foreign ministers of the CA countries. They signed what is known as the Samarkand Declaration, which initiated ministerial meetings in the "5+1" format. In the same period, the European Union revised its Central Asia Strategy (2007). It assumed that since EU-Central Asia relations were built on a bilateral basis, there was no point in talking about relations in the "5+1" format.

In 2017, the foreign ministers of the CA countries and Japan met in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). The meeting adopted a Roadmap for expanding trade and economic cooperation and implementing projects in the field of transport. Overall, Tokyo continued to pursue its policy in the Central Asia plus Japan format,²⁸ although these efforts were in large part wasted. The Central Asian countries, in turn, welcomed the appearance of various multilateral formats. As part of their multi-vector foreign policy, they could cooperate with several major players at once, including the EU, Japan, the United States, and India.²⁹

In the last decade, political processes in Central Asia and economic development in CA countries have been influenced by Iran, Turkey, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Japan.³⁰ Japan has provided a significant amount of investment and strengthened its position in some sectors of the CA countries. By 2017, Japanese outward FDI stock in Uzbekistan reached \$2.5 billion, while the figure for Kazakhstan was \$4.5 billion (the largest in the region).³¹ Japanese companies have been investing in various sectors of the economy, including the automotive industry, telecommunications, textiles, and oil and gas production.

Japan's political interaction with the CA countries has increased in recent years. In October 2018, President Emomali Rakhmon of Tajikistan made his first official visit to Japan, during which the parties discussed the prospects of expanding economic cooperation.

Japan has not abandoned its plans to develop political contacts in Central Asia, particularly in the implementation of multilateral projects. In mid-2019, Japan took part in discussing the creation of a trans-Central Asia economic corridor that would run through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. It is seen as an element of Central Asian integration.³²

²⁶ See: E.S. Alekseenkova, "Srvnitelnyy analiz deiatelnosti sozdannykh v Tsentralnoi Azii formatov '5+1' (s uchastiem SShA, Yuzhnoi Korei, Yaponii i EES)," *Mezhdunarodnaya analitika*, No. 1 (19), 2017, pp. 29-41.

²⁷ See: A. Katkova, "Strategicheskie initsiativy Yaponii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii," *Mirovye i natsionalnoe khoziaistvo*, No. 1, 2018.

²⁸ See: V. Mozevakh, "Investitsionnaya deiatel'nost' Yaponii v stranakh Tsentralnoi Azii," *Mirovye i natsionalnoe khoziaistvo*, No. 1, 2018, pp. 1-3.

²⁹ See: A.A. Kazantsev, I.D. Zviagelskaia, E.M. Kuzmina, S.G. Luzianin, *Perspektivy sotrudnichestva Rossii i Kitaia v Tsentralnoi Azii. Doklad No. 28*, 2016, Russian International Affairs Council, RSMD, Moscow, 2016, 52 pp.

³⁰ See: "Takoe vkusnoe blyudo, pod nazvaniem Tsentralnaia Azia," 1 September, 2019, available at [<https://polit-asia.kz/takoe-vkusnoe-blyudo-pod-nazvaniem-czentrlnaya-aziya/>], 11 November, 2019.

³¹ See: F.P. Urazaeva, op. cit.

³² See: "Novyi ekonomicheskii koridor v Tsentralnoi Azii—alternativa evraziiskoi integratsii?" 6 June, 2019, available at [<https://www.ritmurasia.org/news--2019-06-04--novyj-ekonomicheskij-koridor-v-ca-alternativa-evrazijskoj-integracii-43021>], 12 November, 2019.

Conclusion

Overall, Japanese policy in Central Asia is characterized by continuity. Japan is involved in modernizing and building industrial facilities in CA countries and is expanding its presence in the regional energy sector. This is part of long-term plans to tap the region's hydrocarbon potential in the future. At the same time, Japanese policy in Central Asia is noted for its restraint. In contrast to the economic expansion of China, which has implemented pipeline projects designed to carry oil and gas in the direction of Chinese territory and has "bound" the CA countries to itself by loans, or the United States, which makes active use of political tools to realize its interests, Tokyo focuses on concrete projects, supporting its policy by educational projects, primarily by opening Japanese language centers and providing assistance in the implementation of social projects.

Russia and China, which are geographic neighbors of Central Asia and seek to maintain their geopolitical influence in the region, have kept a close watch on Tokyo's activities. Japanese policy is in the shadow of Moscow and Beijing, but the CA countries' interest in expanding cooperation with Tokyo has increased significantly in recent years. They seek to attract Japanese investments, which simultaneously increase competition in the region. The Central Asian countries have a positive view of Japan's continued interest in the region, as it provides additional opportunities for implementing a multi-vector policy.