

CHINA IN CENTRAL ASIA: GEOPOLITICAL, ECONOMIC, AND SOCIOCULTURAL VECTORS OF INFLUENCE

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A B S T R A C T

The authors discuss new forms of China's economic, sociocultural, geopolitical, and ethnoreligious influence in Central Asia and the factors behind it. They examine the specifics of Chinese, Central Asian and Russian demography and analyze the impact of socioeconomic and demographic processes of the recent years on China's foreign policy. Having analyzed the volumes, dynamics, branch and regional specifics of China's investments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, the authors conclude that they can be described as a new form of realization of China's geopolitical interests in Central Asia and Russia. They have identi-

fied new forms of Chinese migration in the context of China's expanded investments beyond its borders, involvement of Chinese citizens in the "golden visa" programs in Europe and Mediterranean countries and revealed that, more likely than not, labor migrants follow the flows of Chinese money and business migrants, consolidating the economic and geopolitical aspects of Beijing's foreign policy.

The authors have discussed the geopolitical, sociocultural, and economic role of Chinese diasporas in promoting the interests of their homeland and pointed out that the forms of Chinese influence in the world have become more varied.

KEYWORDS: *China, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Central Asia, Russia, diaspora, migration, Chinese communities, remittances, migration, investments.*

Introduction

Central Asia is the geopolitical "pivot" of the Eurasian continent, a region rich in oil, natural gas and various mineral resources and, therefore, an object of rivalry between great powers. Early in the 20th century, three countries—the U.K., China, and Russia—were fighting for control over the region. Today "great" (the U.S., China, India, Russia, Japan, and the EU) and "average" (Turkey, the Middle Eastern countries and Iran) states have joined the active geopolitical game in the region. China, one of the most energetic and powerful players, relies on all sorts of instruments, up to and including its economic, sociocultural and geopolitical advantages, to influence the Central Asian countries.

The Chinese government and business elites demonstrate a lot of pragmatism when consolidating their relations with five Central Asian countries and carefully designate their short-, mid- and long-term interests in the region.¹ At first, China focused on border demarcation and tried to minimize both direct and indirect interference of the Central Asian countries in the problems of ethnic minorities living in China. The border between them is fairly long: 1,782 km with Kazakhstan; 858 km with Kyrgyzstan, and 414 km with Tajikistan. In post-Soviet times the borders were partly demarcated: Beijing treated border demarcation as a national security issue, which explains several demarcation attempts. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was set up in the mid-1990s to resolve border disagreements with Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia.

¹ See: Official site of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, available at [<https://carnegieendowment.org/regions/251>].

Today, China has posed itself the task of consolidating its economic influence and strengthening cooperation in the security sphere as one of its mid- and long-term objectives. Seen from Beijing, Central Asia is brimming with potential and existing threats to China's national security: terrorism, extremism, fundamentalism, and separatism, to name but a few. No wonder it has opted for stronger economic and geopolitical influence in the region to neutralize at least some of the risks and obtain apparent economic preferences.

The Factors of Stronger Chinese Influence in Central Asia and its New Forms

The deep-cutting processes unfolding in the last few years in China became the prerequisites of stronger Chinese influence outside the borders of continental China.

- First of all, it was *the economic factor*, namely, sustained economic growth based on well-planned and successful economic reforms launched in the 1970s. According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China, in 2018 China's GDP equaled 90.03 trillion yuan. In the first quarter of the same year its year-on-year growth was 6.8%, in the second—6.7%, in the third—6.5% and in the fourth—6.4%.² In the course of reforms, the country had accumulated a fairly big investment potential, realized today inside and outside its borders. Its investment potential corresponds to Central Asia's needs in foreign investments. This explains why in recent years China has been pouring money into the region. In 2005-2019, its total investments were nearly \$54 billion, of which \$34.9 billion were invested in Kazakhstan; \$6.8 billion—in Turkmenistan; \$5.6 billion—in Uzbekistan, \$4.7 billion—in Kyrgyzstan; \$2.2 billion—in Tajikistan. China also invested about \$54 billion in Russia (see Fig. 1).
- Secondly, it is *the social factor* or the changes in the social structure of Chinese society caused, in particular, by economic reforms. On the one hand, privatization deprived a great number of people of their jobs, while the domestic market could not accommodate them all. On the other, the Chinese middle class and a wealthy (rich) Chinese stratum have emerged.³ The People's Republic of China has become part of the globalized world, today it is more open than before, which added mobility to these population groups; migration to other countries became possible.

There are two new trends in Chinese migration: highly qualified and wealthy Chinese move in greater numbers than before to the countries of the rich North (the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Europe), where they invest in real estate and businesses. All programs in Southern Europe offer real estate investment as an option. In Spain the minimum price of a property must be at least €500,000; in Portugal—€350,000 (if the property is 30 years old or older, or is located in one of the cities); in Malta newcomers must invest €250,000 or more in bonds and securities and €60,000 in real estate depending on location. Cyprus offers residence permits in exchange for €300,000 invested in real estate and a deposit of

² See: Official site of the National Bureau of Statistics of China, available at [http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/zxfb/201901/t20190121_1645752.html].

³ See: *Rossia i Kitay: izmenenia v sotsialnoy strukture obshchetsva*, ed. by M.K. Gorshkov, Li Peilin Z.T. Golenkova, Novy khronograf, Moscow, 2012, pp. 257-260.

€30,000 in one of the local banks. Greece offers the cheapest program—a residence permit in exchange for a real estate property valued at €250,000 or more (see Fig. 2).

Figure 1

**Volumes of Chinese Investments
in Central Asian Countries and Russia
in 2005-2019, \$bn**

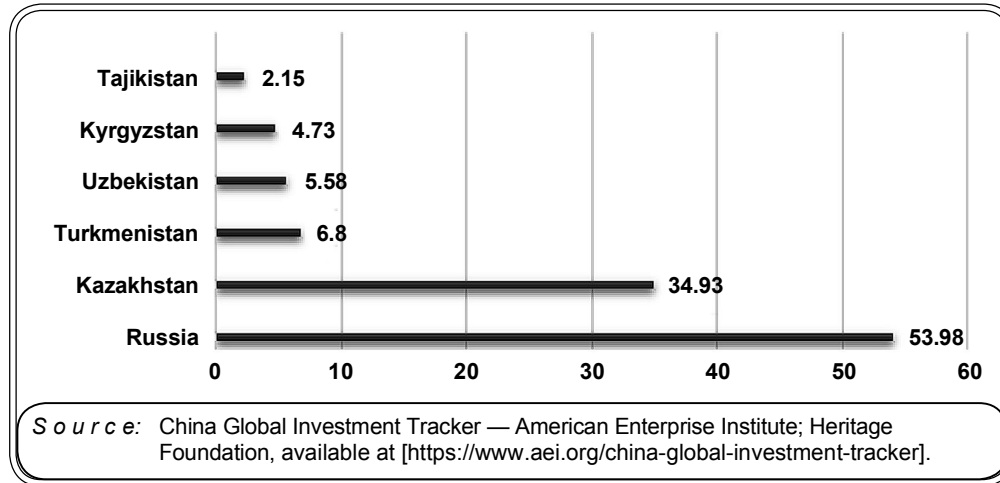
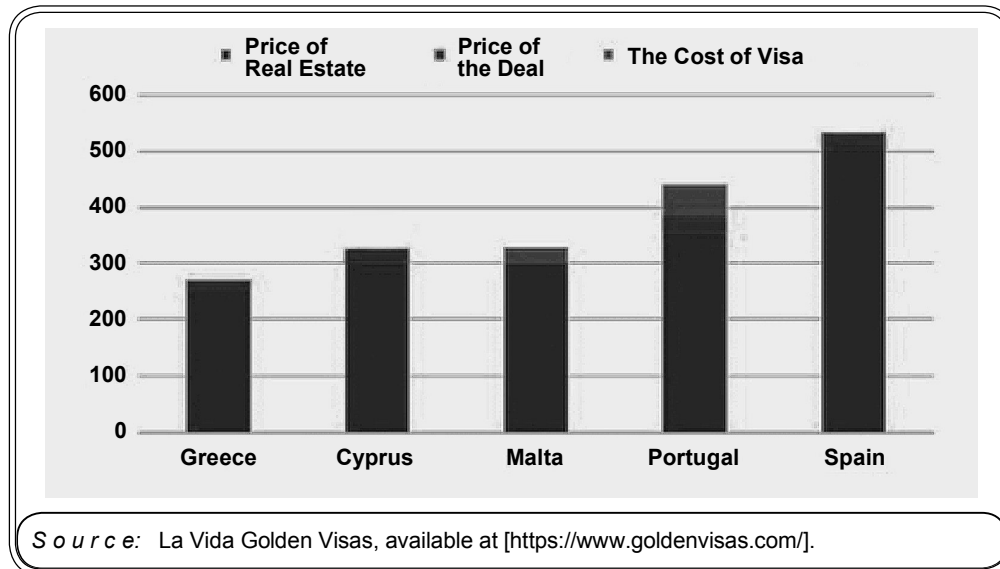


Figure 2

**Minimum Costs of the Golden Visa
in Some of the South European Countries,
thousand euros**



Between the start of the “golden visa” program in Greece and the early 2019, 2,416 citizens of the PRC obtained residence permits in this country.⁴ Highly qualified Chinese migrants (professors, engineers, top managers) actively migrate using work contracts to settle permanently in economically developed countries.

The low-qualified and unqualified Chinese migrants prefer the countries of the “poor South” (the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America); this means that they follow Chinese investments. It is expected that having worked there for several years they will return to China; some of them manage to remain in the host country with different migration statuses.

- Thirdly, it is *the demographic factor*: despite the One Family—One Child policy that has functioned for many years the demographic pressure on China remains strong. The huge demographic potential (1.4 billion) along with other factors creates a considerable migration potential realized through encouraged migration inside the country and an outflow of young able-bodied people to other countries. China occupies the first place in the population size; it “hangs over” its Central Asian neighbors and Russia, which occupy vast and relatively sparsely populated spaces rich in mineral resources (see Table 1).

Table 1

The Key Social-Demographic Indicators of the PRC, Russia, and Central Asia

Indicator	Countries					
	PRC	Russia	Tajikistan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
Total population size, million people (2018)	1,400	144	8.9	18	6.2	32.4
Population between 0-14 years, % (2017)	17.7	25.8	35.3	27.9	31.8	28
Human Development Index (HDI) ranking (2017)	87,	49	127	59	122	105
Level of unemployment, % (2018)	4.7	5.2	10.3	5.1	7.4	6.9
Level of unemployment among the younger generation, % (2018)	10.8	16.3	19.2	4.7	15.9	14.2
Share of urban population, % (2017)	58	74	27	57.3	36.1	50.5
GDP per capita, \$ (2017)	8,826,99	10,743,10	800,97	8,837,46	1,289,82	1,504,23
<p><i>Sources:</i> Based on information supplied by the ILO, UNDP, WB [http://www.ilo.org/ilostat/faces/ilostat-home/home;LOSTATCOOKIE=A10ljqL7_6klz7yvAllQOfBijr7lqpg2BY6PRr18i2e4CUtkouhf11567639201?_adf.ctrl-state=5w96ez0ns_4&_afLoop=262615711648154&_afLoop=2019859534736994&_afWindowMode=0&_afWindowId=null;http://hdr.undp.org/en/data;https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?end=2016&start=2015&view=map].</p>						

⁴ See: Official site of the Migration Policy Ministry of Greece, available at [http://www.immigration.gov.gr/en_US/web/guest/elleniki-metanasteutiki-politiki].

- Fourth, *the ethnic and religious factor* is in play: China's nationalities policy produced fairly ambiguous effects on the ethnic and religious minorities in the country's ethnic regions. The conflict in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region drove Muslim Uyghurs to Central Asia. Kazakhstan's active repatriation policy, designed to attract ethnic Kazakhs (Oralmans), stimulated their migration from China to Kazakhstan. China is not interested in this form of emigration, yet its migrants obviously spread China's influence to Central Asian countries. Elements of Chinese everyday culture have already become part of everyday life of the local peoples.

Mass outflow from China began in the mid-19th century, when emigrants moved to Southeast Asia. Until the end of World War II, the majority of migrants considered themselves as *huáqiáo* (Overseas Chinese) politically and culturally loyal to China.⁵

In the 1950s-1980s, Chinese acquired new directions of emigration from China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Southeast Asia to North America, Australia, and Western Europe. Chinese migrants renounce their Chinese citizenship to become *huaren* (ethnic Chinese living abroad) and vow loyalty to the host country. Starting in 1980, *xin yimin* ("new migrants") from different regions of China prevailed in the total volume of Chinese émigrés.

Investments as a New Form of Realization of China's Geopolitical Interests in Central Asia

In the late 1990s, Chinese investments to Central Asian countries had not exceeded \$1 billion⁶ and were limited to the oil and gas sector; ten years later, the volume increased more than 20 times to make China the region's main financial donor. Its influence became especially obvious after the crisis of 2008, when the traditional sponsors (Russia, the U.S., and Europe) were struggling with budget problems of their own.

China prefers direct investments, and Kazakhstan was the main object of investments: in 2017, 51 China-Kazakhstan projects that amounted to \$27 billion were implemented in different spheres, including agriculture, the most "sensitive" sphere of their bilateral cooperation.⁷ Kazakhstan helps China resolve its demographic problem by settling a million and a half of Chinese citizens, who are ethnic Kazakhs, along its border. According to China, they "want to live in their historical homeland." Between 1991 and 2014, over 136,000 Kazakhs from China received the Oralman status (Kazakhstani repatriate).⁸

China is the key partner of the Kyrgyz Republic; their trade turnover grows faster than the trade between Russia and Kyrgyzstan. China is interested in several promising industrial projects in this country. In 2016, Bishkek rejected the services of RusGidro from Russia in building the Kambarata Hydro Power Plant-1. China regards Kyrgyz invitation to take part in the project as a step towards solving the energy problem in this Central Asian country. China, which needs agri-

⁵ See: H. Liu, E. van Dongen, *The Chinese Diaspora*, Oxford Bibliographies, 2013, 26 pp.

⁶ See: G.I. Chufirin, "Investitsionnoe nastuplenie Kitaia na Tsentralnuu Azii," *Ekonomicheskoe obozrenie*, No. 4, 2012, p. 54.

⁷ See: S. Ryazantsev, A. Ter-Akopov, E. Pismennaya, A. Lukyanova, "Diasporas as Informal Tools for Regulating Migration in the Eurasian Economic Union," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 18, Issue 3, 2017, pp. 35-42.

⁸ See: F. Chuanglin, Yu. Danlin, *China's New Urbanization: Developmental Paths, Blueprints and Patterns*, Springer, 2016, 329 pp.

cultural imports (milk, in particular), plans to build The Star of Asia, a large agricultural complex in the Chui Region in Kyrgyzstan by 2020, with a total area of 4.6 sq. km, to supply China with organic products.

The following bilateral documents recently signed by the two countries attract attention: an agreement on technical and economic cooperation, on joint exploitation of the Kyrgyzstan-China gas pipeline; cooperation in health protection that allowed Kyrgyzstan to rely on traditional Chinese medicine, a credit agreement regarding the construction of the North-South Highway and on a credit of \$10 million to Kyrgyzstan.

China's cooperation with Turkmenistan is, likewise, very active: in 2017, their trade turnover reached \$14.8 billion. Turkmenistan supplies China with natural gas from the Samandepa gas field along the main pipeline built in 2009 as a joint investment project.

Uzbekistan occupies the first place in China's trade turnover. In 2017, its volume reached \$3.2 billion, or 22.7% of the country's turnover. It should be said that the sides increased their cooperation in 2014 on the strength of the agreements between President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov and the Chinese leaders on the highly ambitious five-year economic plan The Program of the Development of Strategic Partnership for 2014-2018 with the Chinese-Uzbek project of cooperation in mining and processing of uranium as its core.

China comes second after Switzerland in the volume of Uzbek export. According to official information, there are over 500 joint ventures with Chinese capital and offices of 70 Chinese companies in the country. In 2019, the total volume of Chinese investments in Uzbekistan's economy was \$5.58 billion (see Table 2).

Table 2

**Spheres of China's Investment
in Central Asian Countries in 2005-2019**

Country	Volume of Investments, \$	Key Spheres of Investment
Kazakhstan	24.8 billion	Power production
	3.68 billion	Transport
	3.68 billion	Chemicals
	2.33 billion	Metals
	350 million	Real estate
Kyrgyzstan	2.89 billion	Power production
	1.69 billion	Transport
	150 million	Metals
Uzbekistan	3.49 billion	Power production
	610 million	Real estate
	460 million	Transport
	440 million	Chemicals
	290 million	Agriculture
	190 million	Metals
	100 million	Other branches

Table 2 (continued)

Country	Volume of Investments, \$	Key Spheres of Investment
Tajikistan	750 million	Power production
	560 million	Transport
	540 million	Metals
	300 million	Real estate
Turkmenistan	6.8 billion	Power production
<p><i>Sources:</i> Based on the data supplied by China Global Investment Tracker—American Enterprise Institute; Heritage Foundation, available at [https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker].</p>		

Despite the fact that Tajikistan received smaller investments than any other of its neighbors, there are over 70 enterprises with Chinese capital functioning in the country and about 200 Chinese companies. The investment and trade cooperation between China and Tajikistan has been steadily growing since 2004, when Chinese companies came to the country aiming to actively implement their projects. For example, the Chinese road and bridge corporation reconstructed the Dushanbe-Qolma-Karasu highway that connects the Tajik capital with the checkpoint on the Tajik-Chinese border. The Sinohydro Corporation rebuilt the highway between Dushanbe and the Kyrgyz border and funded a survey of the sites of planned hydropower plants in Tajikistan. The development of the transborder transport corridor between Dushanbe and Kashgar is an obvious signal that integration of transport and economic corridors leading to the western areas of Tajikistan has been launched. This highway will give China access to Afghanistan and Iran and connect Tajikistan with China, India, and Pakistan. In 2006 and 2013, Chinese companies invested in 1,700 km of newly built highways and 31 km of tunnels.⁹

Chinese Huawei Technologies and ZTE are actively involved in modernizing the Tajikistan communication sector and realize, from time to time, all sorts of social and educational programs: Huawei supplied four secondary schools with computers, and along with the Ministry of the Interior of Tajikistan it built the Automated Traffic Control Center “Secure City” to supervise public order and road safety in Dushanbe. It functions at the Traffic Police Department at the republic’s Ministry of the Interior in order to control traffic lights, regulate traffic, spot transportation means and implement video surveillance on the roads.¹⁰

Bilateral trade is another important sphere of cooperation. In 1993, the volume of bilateral trade was \$9 million, ten years later it was \$39 million and thirteen years later, in 2016, it reached the figure of \$885 million.¹¹ Chinese export to Tajikistan textile and other consumer goods, special equipment, machines, foodstuffs and agrarian raw materials. Today, China exports about 2,000 items to Tajikistan.

China took part in commissioning the Dushanbe Thermal Power Station 1 and 2; Chinese capital was present in other sectors, including mining and processing of lead, zinc and gold, transport and services. The country’s leaders are convinced that Chinese capital helps develop the economy and

⁹ See: S.V. Ryazantsev, Z.K. Vazirov, “Kitayskaia migratsia v Respublike Tadjikistan” *Migratsionnoe vzaimodeystvie Rossii so stranami Vostochnoy i Iugo-Vostochnoy Azii*, Series *Demografia. Sotsiologia. Ekonomika*, Moscow, 2018, pp. 94-98.

¹⁰ See: Official site of the Huawei, available at [<https://www.huawei.com/kz/press-events/news/kz/2018/sistema-bezopasnyi-gorod-v-dushanbe-c-ikt-huawei>]

¹¹ See: “Makroekonomicheskie pokazateli,” Statistical Agency at the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, available at [<https://stat.tj/ru/macroeconomic-indicators>]

moves the country towards its strategic goal of obtaining a developed transport system and energy security. This wide-scale involvement of China in the Tajikistan's economy is however not free from certain or even considerable risks.

Today, China owns about half of the Tajikistan's external debt (over \$1 billion).¹² When realizing their economic projects, Chinese companies prefer to hire their own workers: China invests money on the condition that Chinese migrants are employed in all projects implemented using Chinese money. The Chinese laborers are more disciplined, more diligent and much cheaper. In one of our previous works, we had studied the interconnection between Chinese money and migration.¹³ Employment of Chinese workers is one of the conditions stipulated in the agreement on Chinese investments and cooperation.

In late 2018, China and Tajikistan signed an agreement on investments in the construction of the government and parliamentary complex in Dushanbe totaling \$200 million, on the condition that Chinese labor migrants would be employed.¹⁴

Early in 2019, the main Department of Geology of Tajikistan informed that the Chinese TBEA company obtained a license to construct a gold mining plant in the north of Tajikistan. The project will take two years to complete, Chinese workers and engineers will be employed.¹⁵

In 2019, *The Washington Post* wrote about a Chinese military base in the Murghab District of Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region. The newspaper supported this information with interviews, details detected by satellites and the personal observations of the author of the report.¹⁶ Several days later, Tajik media refuted this information and denied that China had built military facilities at the Tajik-Chinese border under the 2016 agreement. The Foreign Ministry of Tajikistan officially stated that there were no Chinese military bases in Tajikistan. However, other sources informed that Chinese military forces were seen at local markets, while the flags of China and Tajikistan were raised over military facilities.¹⁷ The Chinese government preferred to keep silence.

Despite the highly contradictory information, it should be stated that economic advantages of large-scale Chinese investments are fraught with certain geopolitical risks for the Central Asian countries, primarily, in the border areas.

Investments and New Forms of Chinese Migration to the Central Asian Countries

In the last decade, Beijing has been actively involved in international migration—not only as a source of migrants, but also as a host country. In 2017, about 10 million Chinese migrants lived

¹² See: Information supplied by the Tajik Agency for Statistics. *Vneshneekonomicheskaya deyatelnost Respubliki Tadjikistan*, Dushanbe, 2017, pp. 5-6.

¹³ See: S. Ryazantsev, R. Manshin, Z. Vazirov, M. Karimov, "China's Influence on the Social and Economic Development of the Central Asian States: Methods and Consequences," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, 2018, pp. 18-25.

¹⁴ See: Azia Plus Press Service at the Ministry of Economic Development of the RT, available at [<https://www.news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20180919/kitai-vse-zhe-dast-deneg-na-vozvedenie-parlamentskogo-i-pravitelstvennogo-kompleksov-tadjikistana>].

¹⁵ See: Avesta, available at [<http://avesta.tj/2019/02/01/tvea-v-etom-godu-nachnet-stroitelstvo-zolotodobyvayushhego-predpriyatiya-na-severe-tadjikistana/>].

¹⁶ See: "In Central Asia's Forbidding Highlands, A Quiet Newcomer: Chinese Troops," *The Washington Post*, available at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.cd073fa74412].

¹⁷ See: Azia Plus, available at [<https://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/security/20190221/the-washington-post-prinyala-tadjikskuyu-pogranzastavu-v-murgabe-za-voennii-obekt-kitaya-istochnik>].

and worked abroad, while about 1 million of international migrants were registered in China (see Table 3).

Table 3

**Key Indices of International Migration
in China and Central Asian Countries in 2017**

Index	Countries				
	PRC	Tajikistan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan
Accumulated number of immigrants, <i>thous. people</i>	999.5	273.3	3,600	200.3	1,200
Share of immigrants in total population, %	0.1	3.1	20	3.3	3.6
Migration balance, in 2012-2017, <i>thous. people</i>	-1,600	-100	0	-100	-44.3
Share of women migrants, %	38.6	56.9	50.4	59.6	53.4
Accumulated number of emigrants, <i>thous. people</i>	10,000	578.5	4,100	760.1	2,000
Change in the share of migrants in total population in 1995-2017, %	0	-1.8	0.9	-4.6	-2
Share of migrants below 19, %	29.7	10.6	21.1	13.8	14.1
Share of immigrants over 65, %	10.7	27.1	15.3	21.7	28.8
Number of refugees in the country, <i>thous. people</i>	321.7	2.5	0.6	0.3	0.02
Number of refugees coming from the country, <i>thous. people</i>	207.7	1.4	2.5	2.8	3.4

Source: Data supplied by the U.N. Population Division, UNHCR, 2018, available at [<https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates17.shtml>]; http://popstats.unhcr.org/en/persons_of_concern].

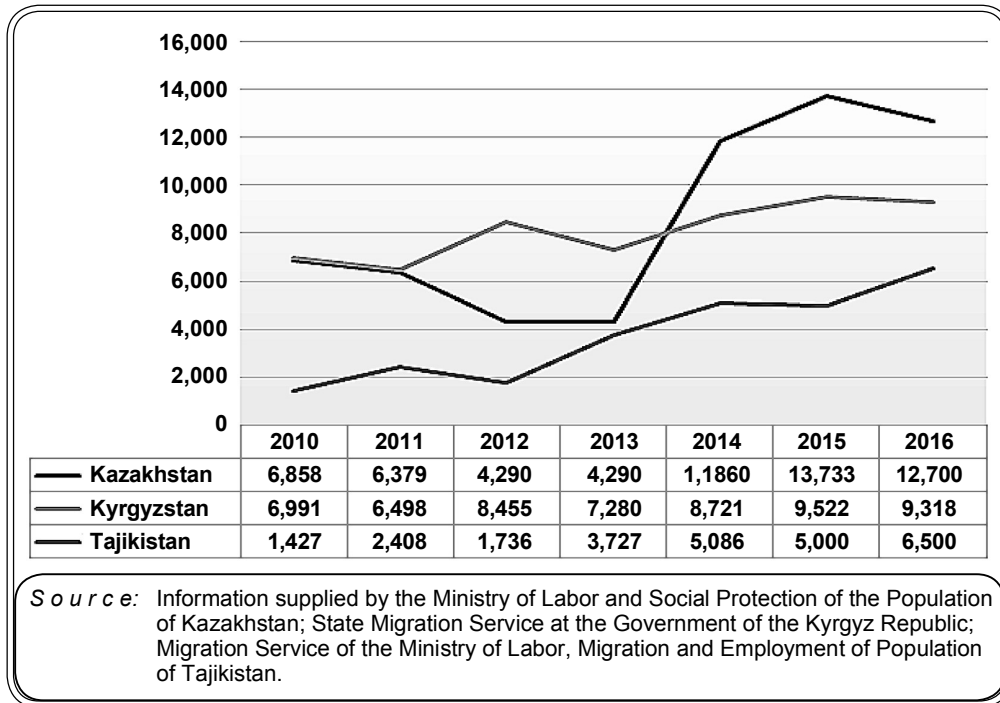
The economic and migration policies of the Central Asian countries have created a paradox. On the one hand, huge numbers of laborers migrate from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Russia, Kazakhstan, Korea, the Middle East, and Europe. On the other, new jobs in Central Asia go to Chinese citizens; this means that no matter how much money China pours into the region, the level of employment among the local population will remain low.

Business migration to Central Asia is a phenomenon that emerged in the early 2000s; it was rooted in a stronger economic cooperation between China and the local countries. Kazakhstan (see Fig. 3) leads in the number of Chinese labor migrants, followed by Kyrgyzstan, where Chinese laborers work on all sorts of large-scale infrastructure projects: the Kyrgyz-Chinese gas pipeline to the Osh Region; the ring road in the Issyk Kul Region; an alternative North-South highway and bypasses in the Batken Region; a thermal power plant in Bishkek, an oil refinery and a gold-mining plant in the Chui Region.¹⁸

¹⁸ See: Official site of the State Migration Service under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, available at [<http://ssm.gov.kg/>].

Figure 3

Chinese Labor Migration in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, 2010-2016, people



Today, Tajikistan occupies the last place in the number of Chinese guest workers, but their number is steadily increasing. In 2016, according to the Migration Service of the Ministry of Labor, Migration and Employment of the Population of Tajikistan, the number of Chinese migrants increased by 30% against the previous year. Today, there are top managers, engineers and businessmen, as well as unqualified workers among them.

By employing well-educated Chinese specialists and qualified workers, the Central Asian countries try to fill the gap in their economies created by the lower quality of education and an outflow of specialists. While closing the gap, employment of Chinese specialists does nothing good for the employment of the local population, many of whom are ready to leave their countries.

Sociocultural and Migration Policies in the Context of China’s Foreign Policy

In the 1990s, China strove to create a sustainable international situation to promote its own and its closest neighbors’ economic development. Today, the Government of the PRC pays a lot of attention to the management of migration, mostly in view of the country’s geopolitical interests, rather than the situation on the labor market.

In the late 20th century, China’s external expansion had intensified and changed its forms: it was implemented as the “external movement” conception, and Central Asian countries were its first targets. Chinese emigration and the active encouragement of Chinese communities and businesses in the neighboring states were its main instruments along with China’s increasingly stronger economic and sociocultural impact.

In fact, Chinese migration is accompanied by the promotion of Chinese culture, philosophy, traditions, goods, science, technologies, design, medicine, cuisine and food. Chinese businesses, restaurants, markets, Chinatowns, Confucius institutes and classrooms are the most visible factors of Chinese presence in any country.

Today, there are 548 Confucius institutes: there are 125 of them in 34 Asian countries (regions), 59 in 43 African countries, 182 in 41 European countries, 161 in 24 American countries and 21 in 5 countries of Oceania. There are 1,193 Confucius classrooms operating: 114 of them are situated in 22 Asian countries; 41 in 18 African countries, 341 in 30 European countries (regions), 595 in 9 American countries and 102 in 4 countries of Oceania.¹⁹

In Central Asia and Russia there are Confucius institutes and classrooms set up to promote the Chinese language and culture (see Table 4).

Table 4

**The Number of Confucius Institutes and Classrooms
in Russia and Central Asia
in 2019**

Country	Number of Confucius Institutes	Number of Confucius Classrooms	Total
Russia	19	5	24
Kazakhstan	5	1	6
Kyrgyzstan	4	21	25
Tajikistan	2	2	4
Uzbekistan	2	0	2

Source: Report of the Institute of Confucius, 全球孔子学院 (课堂) 分布, 2018.

Since 2002 when the Ministries of Public Security, Human Resources and Social Security, Education, and Transport of the PRC issued a joint statement that allowed private companies to act as commercial intermediaries in promoting emigration of Chinese citizens.²⁰ In 2008, the Ministry of Trade of the PRC assumed responsibility for labor migration. The Ministry of Public Security of China controls the agencies of immigration and emigration normally used by those who want to leave the country. Agents and companies working in the labor migration sphere cannot be involved in businesses related to educational migration.²¹

¹⁹ See: *Report of the Institute of Confucius* (全球孔子学院 (课堂) 分布), 2018, available at [<http://www.hanban.org/confuciusinstitutes/>].

²⁰ See: Official site of the Foreign Ministry of China (支持中欧人员往来和移民领域对话项), available at [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_681966/zghgzz_681970/t1266605.shtml].

²¹ See: *Brochure about EU-China Dialog on Migration and Mobility Support Project*, ILO, available at [https://www.ilo.org/beijing/what-we-do/publications/WCMS_421619/lang--en/index.htm].

China attaches great importance not only to the process of emigration and protection of the rights and interests of Chinese citizens abroad. It fights slave trade and illegal immigration. Chinese embassies and consuls provide all sorts of support, including material assistance, to Chinese citizens wishing to settle abroad.

Beijing responded to the growing mobility of the country's population by increasing its involvement in the international management of migration by consolidating regional and international cooperation on the migration-related issues. Today, China attaches more importance to international cooperation in the sphere of immigration and is actively involved in such aspects of immigration as the Global Forum on Migration and Development, the Baltic Process and the Colombo Process.²²

In December 2018, China supported the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration and was actively involved in the debates on global migration. It means that the IOM structures working in the country deal with practically all aspects of migration—from encouraging people's mobility to the prevention of uncontrolled migration and slave trade and keeping them in check.²³

The Geopolitical and Economic Role of Foreign Chinese Communities

Today, ethnic Chinese live in more than 150 countries. Normally, they are defined by the umbrella term “overseas Chinese,” which comprises about 60 million ethnic Chinese living outside continental China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Macao.²⁴ Chinese communities in foreign countries are fairly complicated structures; their members belong to different waves of migration and social layers and come from different regions of China. Despite their variety, they became an important factor or even “reference points” of China's foreign policy.

The 2018 World Bank's Survey on migration and development demonstrated that the volume of global monetary transfers amounted to \$689 billion, an increase caused by stronger economic activity and better employment figures in the United States and restoration of external flows from certain countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council. In 2018, the volume of remittances to the countries with low and average incomes reached \$529 billion, much greater than the flow of direct investments (\$344 billion). In the same year, the volume of remittances from migrants to the East Asian countries increased by 7%, while the following countries received the greatest amounts of remittances from migrants: India (\$79 billion), China (\$67 billion), Mexico (\$36 billion), the Philippines (\$34 billion), and Egypt (\$29 billion).²⁵ China's second place, after India, means that Chinese migrants actively support their relatives and make a considerable contribution to China's social and economic development.

²² See: 中国代表团团长吴海龙大使在国际移民组织第106届理事会会议上的发言, available at [<http://www.china-un.ch/hyyfy/t1319871.htm>].

²³ See: Official site of the International Organization for Migration, available at [<https://www.iom.int/countries/china#dr>].

²⁴ See: China, International Organization for Migration, available at [<https://www.iom.int/countries/china>], 20 March, 2019

²⁵ See: Official site of the World Bank, available at [<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2019/04/08/record-high-remittances-sent-globally-in-2018>].

Conclusion

The Chinese are gradually becoming more mobile internationally, which explains why the Chinese issue is gradually moving to the fore in the political and economic agenda of the Central Asian countries. China's penchant for peaceful development is stressed by the trade and economic cooperation between it and its Central Asian neighbors.

China is building up its partnerships with Central Asia and demonstrates increasingly greater interest in the region.

Seen from the Central Asian capitals, China seems to be a friendly power that offers grants and loans to the region's poorest states (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), opening up positive opportunities for hydrocarbon export from the stronger states (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan), while ensuring competition between them. China offers loans on extremely good conditions—payment deferment of 10 to 15 years, which other powers cannot afford. China prefers to use its own labor in the projects realized using its funds.

Beijing regards the Central Asian states as an important buffer, very much needed to stabilize and develop Xinjiang, whose Uyghur population has certain religious and cultural ties with the populations of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

This explains why Beijing fears that Uyghur separatists may pool forces with Islamic extremists and why China had intensified its cooperation with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation.

China has settled border disputes, contributed to the demilitarization of the border areas, and consolidated the confidence-building measures which, in the final analysis, helped develop the relationships within the SCO.

China will continue buying energy assets and strategic natural resources and winning practically all tenders for building important facilities in Tajikistan and in the rest of the region.

The PRC and Central Asia are much more than geographic neighbors with intertwined economies and a common history; they are tied with deeply rooted migration processes. The authors have revealed the three stages of evolution of Chinese emigration and exposed the factors that stimulate it.

China, Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries will widen their cooperation in power production, infrastructure, agriculture and other fields that will undoubtedly increase all types of migration in the course of implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative related to the broader Silk Road Economic Belt strategy.