

UNDERSTANDING JAPANESE SOFT POWER POLICY AND ITS FEATURE IN CENTRAL ASIA

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.21.1.03>

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ABSTRACT

The states of the Central Asian region obtained their independence in 1991 and have been undergoing a turbulent transition process, such as civil war, cross-border conflicts, revolution and socio-political reforms. Japan has been furthering its cooperation with the Central Asian countries since the day diplomatic relations were established. Despite only a 25-year history of cooperation, Japan has developed numerous and diverse patterns of involvement

in the Central Asian region. There is a positive attitude towards Japan and Japanese people among the population of Central Asian countries. This work explores the features of Japanese soft power policy and its development in Central Asia. The core of the multilateral collaboration format in Japanese Central Asian Policy is "Central Asia + Japan," which aims to promote inter-regional and intra-regional cooperation among the Central Asian states.

KEYWORDS: Japan, soft power, Central Asia, regional cooperation.

Introduction

Central Asia's post-Soviet period attracted various international actors. The region has been subject to the socio-economic partnership and a field of various conflicts. Japan established diplo-

This work was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP20K01519.

matic relations with five states in the early years of their independence and has been advancing them since. Japanese Prime Minister, however, visited Central Asia only twice. The first visit was by PM Koizumi Junichiro in August 2005, when he visited Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Ten years after Koizumi's visit, PM Abe Shinzo visited Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan on 22-28 October, 2015, and became the first Japanese PM and the political leader of G7 countries to pay a visit to all five countries. Prime Minister Abe's speech assured of active efforts being made by Japan to resolve challenges faced by all Central Asian states¹ and of its intention to contribute to the region's development. This speech did, however, have another aim, namely to counter China, which was gaining momentum, and boost leverage with Russia.² The Japanese government has not changed its diplomatic stance in the region since 1997.

PM Hashimoto Ryutaro declared the New Silk Road Diplomacy at the meeting of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives on 24 July, 1997.³ This strategy is a part of Eurasian Diplomacy, introduced by Hashimoto Administration, which aims to involve Russia in the East Asian regional order so as to counter China's influence. In order to further the relationship under the flag of the New Silk Road Diplomacy, Hashimoto Administration had dispatched the Obuchi Mission headed by Foreign Minister Obuchi Keizo to Russia and four Central Asia states, except Tajikistan, where a civil war was underway. The Obuchi Mission was the first visit of the Japanese Foreign Minister to Central Asia and signified the launch of Japanese Central Asian policy. In this mission, however, Central Asian policy was a part of policy towards Russia and China. Hashimoto Administration had been tackling the Northern Territories issue with Russia. One of the aims of the mission was to obtain the support of or to reach an understanding with Central Asian states on the Japanese stance on the northern territorial problem. Since Obuchi succeeded Prime Minister Hashimoto in July 1998, it seemed that Central Asian diplomacy would also advance. Unfortunately, the sudden death of Obuchi in May 2000 led to a temporary loss of momentum in Japan's Central Asian diplomacy. The second round of Central Asian diplomacy started in 2004 under the Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko. She introduced the Central Asia + Japan dialog, which influences the regional cooperation and the basic scheme of Japan's Central Asian policy nowadays. This is an original framework of Central Asia + Advanced Country, and a first multilateral cooperation framework with Japanese participation. It answers the following questions: What is the scale of Japanese involvement in the Central Asian region? What are the tools of Japanese cooperation in the region? How has Japan been developing soft power in Central Asia?

Insights on Cooperation

Despite the progress in political dialog, the economic initiatives are comparatively modest. Timur Dadabaev believes that despite high expectations, Japanese involvement in the region remains mainly confined to ODA disbursements and various forms of economic and technical assistance.⁴ Japanese influence remains limited, with several directions for participation that are yet to be ex-

¹ See: *Speech by Prime Minister Abe on Japan's Foreign Policy Toward Central Asia*, 28 October, 2015, available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/ca_c/kz/page1e_000055.html].

² See: "Abe Looking to Visit Five Central Asia Nations in October," *Japan Times*, 14 July, 2015, available at [<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/07/24/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-looking-visit-five-central-asia-nations-october/#.XY0t-y2KXOR>].

³ See: "About the Silk Road Initiative," MOFA Japan, available at [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/kaidan/yojin/arc_02/silkroad_a.html], July 2012 (in Japanese).

⁴ See: T. Dadabaev, "Chinese and Japanese Foreign Policies towards Central Asia from a Comparative Perspective," *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, 2014, pp. 123-145.

plored.⁵ The geographical aspects easily explain why Japan did not manage to increase its influence in this region. Even if a Japanese company is interested in Central Asia's natural resources, importing them from this region is a challenge. Japan has a disadvantage in connectivity with Central Asia. However, Dadabaev provides a skeptical assessment of the Japanese soft power policy in the area by indicating the disparity between the Japanese-led educational programs and the almost null employment opportunities in Japan. On the other hand, he believes that Japan has been doing a lot for the promotion of cultural interaction by establishing Japan Centers and regularly holding cultural events both in Japan and Central Asia.

According to Khalil-ur-Rahman Shaikh, Japan has considerable interests in the Central Asian region, associated with natural resources and the region's geopolitical location, while the regional states need to cooperate with other countries due to recently acquired independence and weak economy. Both sides can benefit from this collaboration; however, more initiatives are required to strengthen the partnership. In reference to human relationships, the expert pointed to the history of Japanese prisoners of war in Central Asia after World War II. Their contribution to the reconstruction of the post-war development of the region led to mutual tolerance between the prisoners and the local population. The issue of Japanese POWs, as this study revealed, is often on the agenda in the meetings of various levels between Japan and Central Asian representatives. For example, Prime Minister Abe highlighted prisoners' contribution to the reconstruction of Central Asian cities in his speech at Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan in 2015. He stressed that the recent peace in Japan was built upon the precious sacrifice made by these people.⁶

In the early 2000s, a group of experts was against any political intervention in domestic affairs of the Central Asian countries by the Japanese government, countering those who expected Japan to support the democratization process in Central Asia. Japan, unlike the U.S. and EU, which often point to the issue of human rights in the region, may act appropriately, and propose further reforms and democratization to the region.⁷ Democratization should not be imposed from outside, but instead be inculcated domestically as part of the political evolutionary process.⁸ This strategy was welcomed in the region where newly independent countries, seeking a mutual partnership with developed countries, have been attempting to develop governance that is more similar to their political culture.

Soft is Preferable to Hard

The concept of soft power, which was coined by Joseph Nye, is relatively new in modern politics. The traditional concept of power, which is generally associated with political realism (Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes and Rousseau), defines all politics as a struggle for power.⁹ Adherents of neo-realism have criticized this definition. The liberal school of international relations criticized the concept of management by stressing that many important global outcomes cannot be adequately explained by power, but are better understood through the salutary presence of democracy, specific configurations of domestic interests, liberal values, economic interdependence, or international insti-

⁵ See: T. Dadabaev, *Japan in Central Asia: Strategies, Initiatives, and Neighboring Powers*, Palgrave Macmillan, U.S., 2016.

⁶ See: R.Sh. Khalil, "Japan's Relations with Central Asia," *Daily Times*, 26 April, 2018, available at [<https://dailytimes.com.pk/232415/japans-relations-with-central-asia>].

⁷ See: A. Kawato, "What is Japan up to in Central Asia?" in: *Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy: Paving the Road Ahead*, ed. by Ch. Len, T. Uyama, T. Hirose, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, Washington, Stockholm, 2008, p. 23.

⁸ See: "Executive Summary," in: *Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy: Paving the Road Ahead*, p. 11.

⁹ See: H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1962.

tutions.¹⁰ The concept of soft power is defined as the use of culture, political values, and foreign policies to attract or influence, rather than coerce or induce, the behavior of others.¹¹ It also refers to a state's ability to shape other states' foreign policy choices through non-coercive measures. The main criticism of this concept is that it is "too soft."¹² The concept of soft power was built upon the current popularity of American culture abroad and the opportunity to influence other countries' government. The Japanese soft power policy, however, differs from that of the U.S. in the sense that Japan's culture is comparatively less popular, which forces the government to work on promotion of its cultural popularity in the world.

Cultural Diplomacy or Soft Power

This work examines the Japanese understanding of soft power. This concept is a tool of the Japanese foreign policy, which is consistently described as cultural diplomacy. The Japanese multi-dimensional soft power approach stirs up controversy among experts. After the end of World War II Japan was banned from using its military in international disputes. That is why it had to develop a mechanism to influence its international partners' decision-making process, and the concept of soft power has proven essential. Japanese cultural diplomacy, anime and computer games are a few examples of the popularity of the country's culture abroad. Seiko Yasumoto believes that in addition to ODA and other forms of cooperation with various states, Japan has made significant contributions to the domain of popular culture. She stated that the complimentary access of younger Asians to Japanese media could be seen as an improvement of regional cooperation, political relations and better mutual understanding.¹³

The Cool Japan policy, similar to Cool Britannia in the 1990s, is another example of Japanese soft power. Christine Yano believes that the efforts invested in creating the image of Cool Japan led to the transformation of Japanese popular culture into soft power.¹⁴

The Japanese Soft Power policy may prove useful to the country's entire sphere of cooperation. Sugiura Tsutomu explained that culture as a source of soft power is also necessary for businesses. On the other hand, too much government emphasis on Cool Japan might put people off as the popularity of Japanese culture was precisely due to a lack of government control and presence of free expression.¹⁵

Agawa Naoyuki emphasized "personal soft power" as an additional source of Japanese soft power. This element of Japanese culture can be used in various aspects of international cooperation, such as among politicians, diplomats and the general public.¹⁶

This study demonstrated that despite the considerable work of experts on analyzing Japanese soft power, there are very few research studies on the subject of Japanese soft power promotion in the

¹⁰ See: M. Barnett, R. Duvall, "Power in International Politics," *International Organization*, No. 59, Issue 1, 2005, pp. 39-75.

¹¹ See: J. Nye, "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly*, No. 119, Issue 2, 2004, pp. 255-270.

¹² N. Ferguson, "Think Again: Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, No. 134, January-February 2003, pp. 18-24.

¹³ See: S. Yasumoto, "Impact on Soft Power of Cultural Mobility: Japan to East Asia," *Mediascape*, No. 1, Winter 2011, pp. 1-13.

¹⁴ See: Ch.R. Yano, "Wink on Pink: Interpreting Japanese Cute as It Grabs the Global Headlines," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, No. 68, Issue 3, 2009, pp. 681-688.

¹⁵ See: T. Sugiura, "Japan's Creative Industries: Culture as a Source of Soft Power in the Industrial Sector," in: *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, ed. by Y. Watanabe, D. McConnell, M.E. Sharpe, Inc, New York, 2008, pp. 128-153.

¹⁶ See: N. Agawa, "Japan Does Soft Power," in: *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, pp. 226-229.

Central Asian region. Furthermore, most of the experts, especially in Japan, believe that the Japan-Central Asia cooperation model is tied entirely to energy security, the region's geopolitical location, or its importance for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Japanese Soft Power Development

Asia, particularly Southeast Asia, has been considered the primary region where Japan is heavily promoting its soft power and cultural policy. Japan had made a significant contribution to modernization and active development in Southeast Asia in the early years. Products made in Japan have become very popular along with its culture and traditions. *The Japan Times* indicated that the Japanese government's export of culture, including animation, fashion and food seeks to promote Japan's "soft power" in a PR strategy called Cool Japan.¹⁷ *The Economist* added that the government-initiated promotion of Cool Japan is part of the Abe Administration's new strategy. The government of Shinzo Abe is in the process of spending some ¥90 billion (\$883m) to propel Japan's creative industries abroad.¹⁸

Japanese culture is popular in Central Asia, too. However, unlike Southeast Asia, Japanese participation in the development of Central Asia is modest. Japanese technology, economy, education, literature and anime are among the aspects well known among Central Asians. Besides, after World War II, Japan as a nation has improved its image as a peace-promoter. It has contributed to peace and stability in various countries. Nowadays, the sense of cultural and racial similarities between Japanese and the Central Asian nations is the subject of research. Japanese scholars heed particular attention to the hypothesized connection between the Japanese race and the Ural-Altai races, which the population of some of the Central Asian countries belongs to. Japan has been attracting the younger generation from Central Asia to study and work in Japan. In this manner Japan contributes to the development of human resources in Central Asia. The number of students learning Japanese has been increasing.

The youth of Central Asia are discovering manga, anime, Japanese pop music, fashion and food. All of the above components are part of the Cool Japan concept and cultural diplomacy which, in the future, may be used to enhance the implementation of soft power in the region. The government of Japan understands that Japanese manga or animation attracts the young people in Central Asia. For example, MOFA of Japan used symbolic characters for the all states that participate in the Central Asia + Japan dialogue for the promotion of the basic framework of its Central Asian policy (see Fig. 1).

Furthermore, the model of Japan's post-war recovery could be useful for some of the Central Asian states. Japan demonstrates its own model of democracy, transition to the market economy, regional cooperation and promotion of peace. In November 2006, Foreign Minister Aso Taro presented the idea of the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity, as a diplomatic policy of the first Abe Administration (2006-2007). In his speech, Aso assured that Japan is willing to guide and support the newly independent and transitional countries.¹⁹

¹⁷ See: "Cool Japan: Exporting Culture via 'Cool Japan'," *The Japan Times*, 15 May, 2012, available at [<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2012/05/15/news/exporting-culture-via-cool-japan>].

¹⁸ See: "Japan's Soft Power: Squaring the Cool," *The Economist*, 16 June, 2014, available at [<http://www.economist.com/blogs/banyan/2014/06/japans-soft-power>].

¹⁹ See: *Speech by Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan's Expanding Diplomatic Horizons"*, MOFA, 30 November, 2006, available at [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html>].

The Characters of Central Asia + Japan



Source: [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/europe/caj/image/wallpaper10years.jpg>].

The global actions of cultural and development promotion have been implemented by Japan Centers. The Japan Centers, supported by JICA, are vital institutions that operate outside the country, aiming to highlight Japan's ODA activities. They are hubs for training business personnel in the host countries and developing human networks, opening their doors to the locals who are interested in Japan. These centers target three main directions: business, language and the promotion of mutual understanding. Furthermore, these programs initiate the introduction of the Central Asian nations to Japanese public and vice versa. People in Japan associate Central Asia with the Great Silk Road that brought Buddhism and civilization from the west to Japan.²⁰ Considering this historical fact, the governments of Central Asian countries are stepping up their efforts to attract more Japanese tourists.

This study explored the political segment of cooperation that is capable of becoming a source of soft power enhancement. The Japan initiated the Central Asia + Japan dialog in an effort to stimulate regional cooperation. The sides frequently hold meetings in this format, promoting inter-regional cooperation and strengthening intra-regional collaboration. This initiative allowed Japan to take a stance in the region and is continuation of a former Prime Minister Hashimoto's "Eurasian diplomacy." This political dialog enables Japan to advocate for regional cooperation. Furthermore, this is the first real-time implementation of the Central Asia + Advanced Country format and the first multilateral cooperation framework with Japanese participation.

Japanese Embassies and JICA Representatives play a significant role in the above-mentioned processes. These institutions are instructed to promote government policies abroad by engaging themselves in various projects, including the organization of cultural and traditional festivals. In fact, Japan has been leveraging its presence in the region for almost 30 years. Japan also has rivals in the region, i.e., Russia, China, Korea, Turkey, Iran and EU. This study has defined the socio-political groups that are lobbying Japanese presence in the region. Japan has been increasing its presence in these countries, partially because of support provided by such groups. Most members of these groups

²⁰ See: F. Kishida, "Kazakhstan, Japan Mark 25 Years of Diplomatic Relations," Kazinform, Astana, 2017, available at [https://www.inform.kz/en/kazakhstan-japan-mark-25-years-of-diplomatic-relations_a3021924].

were either educated in Japan, employed by Japanese companies or have shared business interests with the Japanese. Some elements of the Japanese culture were introduced in Central Asia through other states. For example, the popularity of Japanese food was transmitted via Russian media and TV shows. About five million Central Asians have been working in Russia, which certainly influences their food choices and life-style. Furthermore, Japanese martial arts, such as Karate-do, Judo and Aikido became popular among ordinary citizens of the region because of Hollywood movies.

This work examined Japan's achievements in the sphere of population and sustainable development, in particular, its healthy society and active ageing have been a model of progress for many Asian countries. Kazakhstan studies the experience of Japan, particularly the adoption and implementation of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) that has covered all health care services and significantly improved the general health of the population. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, with their high fertility rate, are studying the birth control and family planning options through Japanese experience. A group of Central Asian parliamentarians occasionally communicate with their Japanese colleagues on this topic regarding the adoption of related policies and programs. In this study this interest correlates with the soft power component, where the Japanese model prompts another state to follow it.

Kazakhstan

Japanese involvement in Kazakhstan is broader; it involves direct investment, loans, technical cooperation, import-export, cultural and innovation centers. Rich in natural resources, Kazakhstan is a potentially attractive destination for Japanese companies. The Japan Center in Kazakhstan also promotes Japanese culture by providing language classes and business seminars. The innovation centers are widely operating in various Kazakhstan institutions, such as Kazakh-Japan innovation center at the Kazakh National Agrarian University. A cultural center with a Japanese garden was opened at Nazarbayev University. Human development programs encourage students from Kazakhstan to study in Japan. Furthermore, direct flights connecting Astana and Tokyo have been operating since 2019, which stimulates people to travel and get to know each other.

The political dialog between Japan and Kazakhstan constantly deepens. After Prime Minister Abe's Central Asian tour in 2015, the first President of Kazakhstan Nazarbayev paid an official visit to Japan in 2016 and addressed the National Diet. Both countries regularly hold meetings of the Kazakh-Japanese Joint Commission of Public and Private Sectors, with a focus on economic and other development issues.

At the international and global level, the two countries cooperate through UNSC on issues like nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. The Japanese pavilion at EXPO 2017 in Astana, which presented various energy projects, was one of the most popular. The Japanese health care system attracts Kazakh specialists because of the ongoing health reform in Kazakhstan, including consideration of potential implementation of Universal Health Coverage.

Kyrgyzstan

Cooperation between Japan and Kyrgyzstan occurs on a comparatively lower scale.

- First of all, this is because of the country's geographical location and modest natural resources.
- Secondly, it is the weakness of its economy and political instability.

The flow of Japanese ODA to Kyrgyzstan in first and second decades of post-independence concentrated on the development of infrastructure, agriculture and human resource sectors, which eventually supported the country's transition process.

The Japan-Kyrgyzstan relationship entails cultural cooperation too. Japan Center for human development is one of the institutions that represent Japan. Furthermore, the Kyrgyz culture was introduced to the Japanese society through various programs. In 2018, the Kyrgyz film *Centaurus* was released in several cinemas in Japan, while in the same year NHK, the national TV channel, was broadcasting a program about Kyrgyzstan.

Tajikistan

Japan is not the main trade and business partner of Tajikistan. It has been contributing to the development of Tajikistan, and many people in Tajikistan still view the Japanese as investors. There are few Japanese companies active in Tajikistan. On the other hand, the interest in Japanese culture displays a tendency to increase. The number of Tajik students enrolling at Japanese universities has been growing. In the past, the students were enrolled through programs supported by Japan, while recently the number of self-supported students have been growing. After graduation, young people are seeking internship and employment opportunities at Japanese companies. This is because of the Japanese open-door policy to foreign employees where local companies recruit international employees. Japan's post-war recovery and maintenance of the stability and peace could be a model for Tajikistan, which experienced civil conflict in 1992-1997. Japan conducted certain projects that supported peace and stability in Tajikistan. Furthermore, Tajikistan is one of the main partners of Japan in matter of reconstruction of Afghanistan.

This study concluded that the work of Japan in the population and sustainable development sector was studied by the Tajikistan side, which encouraged Tajikistan to set up a new institution—the National Council on Population and Development—in 2014. It aimed to address policies and programs and targeted SDGs, while consolidating all interested parties, including the civil society and NGOs.

In the tourist sector, the Japanese are attracted by Tajikistan's ancient history that descends from the Aryan civilization. It has been home to various religions, such as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Hellenism and Islam, for centuries. The discovery of Buddha in Nirvana statue and the reform of the National Museum of Antiquities of Tajikistan by the Japanese demonstrates their interest in the Tajik culture.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, with its immense gas and oil reserves, is the deployment zone of several Japanese energy projects. It was in Turkmenistan that Japan signed the largest bilateral agreement in Central Asia totaling \$18 billion during Prime Minister Abe's visit. Japanese companies, such as Sumitomo Corporation, Kawasaki Plant System Ltd. and Sojitz Corporation have been investing in Turkmenistan's chemical and energy sectors.

Furthermore, the study shows that both sides are collaborating in matters of global and regional concern, such as supporting peace and reconstruction in Afghanistan, coordination of efforts for the creation of a zone free of nuclear weapons in the region.

As far as the development of human potential is concerned, unlike other Central Asians, few Turkmen students study in Japan and the number of Turkmen public officers doing internships at

Japanese institutions are moderate. However, the Turkmen government has invited Japan to support personnel training of Turkmen specialists within Turkmenistan. Oguz Khan University of Engineering Technologies is an institution that teaches the Japanese advanced science and technology curriculum, including the Japanese language. Several Japanese and Turkmen universities signed agreements on academic exchange and cooperation. Since the number of Turkmen public officers trained and educated in Japan is not high, the probability of implementing soft power in this country is comparatively lower at this point, while it does not mean that Japanese involvement will be limited in the future.

Uzbekistan

Japan's presence in Uzbekistan is rather apparent. Japan and Uzbekistan first signed the strategic partnership agreement in 2002, 2015 and expanded this partnership in 2019 after President Mirziyoyev's visit to Japan. The Japanese contribution to Uzbekistan's economy demonstrates positive dynamics by promoting import-export, direct investment, loans, grants and technical assistance. Some Japanese companies have their representative offices in Uzbekistan, while joint ventures, such as Isuzu, Marubeni, Mitsubishi and others have been active in this country.

At the international level, both countries continue to support peace and stability in Afghanistan. They criticize all forms of terrorism and call for strengthening multilateral cooperation to improve counter-terrorism capabilities. This work has concluded that Japan and Uzbekistan closely collaborate in culture, education, tourism and academic sectors. Japanese universities established a partnership with several institutions in Uzbekistan, increasing the interest in Japanese culture and tradition. Uzbekistan-Japan Center trains specialists in business development, teaches language, familiarizes the local population with Japanese culture and provides various related information about Japan. The highest number of Japanese tourists in Central Asia has been noted in Uzbekistan, since Uzbekistan Airways was the only regional airline that offered direct flights to Japan until 2019.

Japan has been contributing to the human resource development of Uzbekistan by providing internship and capacity building courses for public officers at Japanese institutions. The results of this cooperation is illustrated by the growing number of Uzbekistanis in Japan, which is over 3,000 as of December 2019.²¹ The chances of exercising the soft power in this country for Japan is relatively high.

Conclusion

Japanese soft power policy is a tool of the government's foreign policy. The strategy calls for the promotion of its socio-political culture to people in various countries. The scale of Japanese presence in the region is due to the growing popularity of its culture in Central Asia, as a model of development, as well as the geopolitical location and the reserves of natural resources in Central Asia. However, considering the geographical conditions, it is a challenge to create a new corridor between Central Asia and Japan. Even if the sides aim to strengthen the relationship through trade and material exchange, the problem of connectivity, which involves China and Russia as a transit corridor, remains, while the so-called South Corridor via Afghanistan and Iran is unstable. Considering these geopolitical factors, soft power is the most effective Japanese policy in the region. This study dem-

²¹ See: "Japan-Uzbekistan Relations (Basic Data)," MOFA, 5 November, 2020, available at [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/uzbekistan/data.html>].

onstrated examples of criticism of soft power concept, even though this concept is a suitable instrument of Japanese foreign policy, which has limited itself in the use of traditional (hard) power. Furthermore, this work reveals that even though Japan's involvement in Central Asia was moderate, there was still a soft power policy in play. However, considering Japan's resources and comparing its engagement in other Asian sub-regions, such as Southeast Asia, the Japanese presence in Central Asia and its impact on local population are moderate. On the other hand, two sides have an enormous collaboration potential, which may become a platform for expansion of Japanese soft power in the region.

KAZAKHSTAN'S "ENERGY PLURALISM": LONGSTANDING AND NEW RISKS

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37178/ca-c.21.1.04>

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the current trends in the development of the energy sector in the Republic of Kazakhstan. It is a key factor in the country's competitiveness and a driver of the comprehensive modern-

ization of Kazakhstani society. Considerable attention is heeded to the development risks in various sectors of the fuel and energy complex that affect Kazakhstan's multi-vector energy policy. The urgent task of the country's