

Japan's Foreign Policy in Central Asia: Key Stages and Development Trends

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the main stages of the formation and development of the Japanese foreign policy vector in Central Asia. Japan was the first country to approach Central Asia as a single region requiring joint problem solving. However, despite this, Tokyo's diplomatic activity in the region was not as high as that of other countries. This can be explained by several factors: geographical remoteness, Japan's other foreign policy priorities, and significant investment and political risks in Central Asia. Japan's foreign policy in Central Asia has evolved from insignificant interest to active cooperation in key areas such as economics, security, and humanitarian cooperation. The dynamic development of the Central Asian direction in Japan's foreign policy was demonstrated by the six-party format "Central Asia plus Japan" initiated in August 2004. The article analyzes the goals, principles, and mechanisms of this format, its role in strengthening political dialogue, economic cooperation, and regional stability. It was also found that the countries of Central Asia rich in mineral resources and possessing significant human potential, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, are of the greatest interest to Japanese business. Features of Japan's economic cooperation with these countries, including investment projects, development of infrastructure and the energy sector, are analyzed. Attention is paid to the difference in trade relations between Japan and Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan, having no access to the sea, exports natural gas only through pipelines. However, significant reserves of uranium and rare metals attract Japanese investment. Uzbekistan also supplies agricultural products to Japan, including cotton, and Japan exports machinery, equipment, electronics and medical equipment. In general, Japanese diplomacy has been able to successfully establish regular political dialogue with the countries of Central Asia and gain a positive reputation in the region. Japan has established itself as a country that effectively promotes "soft power" in Central Asia, which is manifested through the implementation of projects in the fields of education, science, ecology, and agricultural development.

Keywords: international partnership, investments, resource diplomacy, strategic partnership, global trends.

Introduction. In the modern world, where tensions and security threats are growing alongside intensified globalization, the stability and development of individual countries – as well as that of the entire Central Asian region – depend on effective multilateral cooperation. Complex global challenges require the countries of the region to engage actively with global actors, opening new opportunities to strengthen economic, political, and cultural ties. In this context, it is important to consider the

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historical and cultural foundations of foreign policy, as exemplified by Japan – a country that, despite its geographical location and long-standing traditions, actively seeks to expand its engagement with various regions of the world.

Japanese statehood developed gradually, acquiring unique features and traditions of governance specific to Japan alone. The essence and characteristics of any nation are manifested through its mindset, which becomes particularly evident when compared across different cultures. Japan's historical path was shaped by a unique combination of geographical factors (its peripheral position relative to world civilizations), specific historical development (over 200 years of isolation), and favorable external conditions (the absence of foreign threats). These conditions did not foster the formation of a unified religious-philosophical system.

According to legend, the Japanese imperial state was founded on February 11, 660 BCE – a date that has been commemorated as a national holiday, National Foundation Day, since 1966. Japan's isolated island position contributed to the preservation of the existing order and the power of the ruling elite (Adilkhodjaeva, 2024). Japanese interest in Central Asia dates back to the Meiji era. Historical records indicate that in 1880, Japanese diplomat Tokuzo Nishi – who later became Japan's Minister of Foreign Affairs – traveled through Central Asia for 40 days on his way home, visiting cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, and the Fergana Valley.

In the early 1990s, the Central Asian region was not regarded as an independent and significant actor in global politics, but rather as part of the vast Eurasian space, the destabilization of which could pose a threat to global security and stability (Lebedeva, 2021, p. 136). However, following their independence, the Central Asian countries began to seek their own development paths and aimed to establish themselves in the international political system. Unlike Russia and China, which maintained a certain distance, Japan unexpectedly took a proactive role in cooperating with the Central Asian states.

One of the key motives behind Japan's active involvement in Central Asia in the early 1990s was its desire to avoid isolation in the context of increased engagement between former socialist countries and Western security structures. This was particularly relevant to the institutionalization of the CSCE (which was transformed into the OSCE in 1994), as well as NATO initiatives such as the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the "Partnership for Peace" program. Following the collapse of the USSR – which had previously been considered one of the primary threats by Japan during the Cold War – the international landscape changed, prompting Tokyo to revise its strategic approach to security issues. In response to new geopolitical challenges, Japan became an associate member of the OSCE and focused on providing "soft security," becoming a major donor of Official Development Assistance (ODA) both globally and within the countries along the Silk Road (Murashkin, 2012, p. 34).

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Over the past 30 years, Japan has sought to strengthen its presence in Central Asia by positioning itself as an alternative international partner to traditional powers such as Russia, and more recently, China. The formats of cooperation between Japan and Central Asia have been diverse and dynamic, reflecting both the region's evolving realities and Japan's transformation in how it perceives its own role in world politics. A key aspect of Japan's foreign policy has been the use of "soft power." After World War II, Japan aimed to change its international image, seeking to shed its former reputation as an aggressor. Through soft power – encompassing cultural and public diplomacy, as well as development assistance – Japan created favorable conditions for the implementation of its foreign policy initiatives (Dmitrieva, 2022, p. 476).

The objective of this article is to analyze Japan's role in the establishment and development of relations with Central Asia and to examine the mechanisms and forms of cooperation that have contributed to strengthening Japan's position in this strategically important region.

Materials and Methods. This study utilized materials drawn from scholarly articles published in peer-reviewed journals accessible through platforms such as Google Scholar and Scopus. The analysis focused on theoretical approaches to the study of foreign policy, international relations, and cooperation strategies employed by Japan in Central Asia. The primary research method was analytical, involving a systematic review and evaluation of existing theories, concepts, and practices related to Japan's foreign policy, as well as academic studies on the geopolitical positioning of Central Asia and the factors influencing diplomatic and economic relations between Japan and the countries of the region.

The historical analysis method was applied to trace the evolution of Japan's foreign policy over time and to understand the impact of key historical events – such as the dissolution of the Soviet Union – on Japan's relations with Central Asian states. Additionally, a comparative method was employed to contrast Japan's approach to cooperation in Central Asia with the foreign policy strategies of other global powers, such as Russia and China.

Results. The evolution of the study of international relations in Japan is best understood within its historical context. Prior to 1945, the discipline was perceived as a combination of international law, history, and economics. The study of international relations in Japan developed under the influence of practical needs associated with the modernization of the East Asian state. In other words, it reflected the principle of *raison d'état* (Inoguchi, 1989).

The peoples of Central Asia and Japan often refer to centuries-old trade, cultural, and humanitarian connections established along the Silk Road. Notable examples include rare artifacts created in the 13th century in Samarkand, which are now preserved in the ancient Japanese city of Nara, the former imperial capital. Additionally, the spread of Buddhism – introduced to Japan in the 6th century via Central Asia through China

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and Korea – is frequently cited as an illustration of early trans-regional exchange (Dadabaev, 2023).

Traditionally, Japan has prioritized the Asia-Pacific region in its foreign policy, particularly East Asian countries and the United States. Central Asia was not historically considered a key area of Japanese foreign policy engagement. During the Soviet period, ties between Japan and Central Asia were extremely limited. Japan's relatively minimal involvement in regional processes in Central Asia can be explained by a set of objective factors that hindered its influence in the region (see Table 1).

Table 1. Factors Influencing the Formation of Japan's Policy in Central Asia

Factors Hindering the Expansion of Japan's Influence	Factors Contributing to the Strengthening of Relations
Geographical remoteness from Central Asia	Japan's significant economic capacity
Japan is not regarded as a major military power	Japan's positive image as a peaceful power
Cultural detachment and limited Japanese language skills	Japan advocates for democratic values and human rights while maintaining a non-coercive approach
Lack of shared security interests	Readiness to take into account the cultural and traditional characteristics of regional states

In summary, considering both the positive and negative factors influencing the formation of Japan's policy in Central Asia, it can be argued that Japan possesses ample opportunities to successfully promote cooperation with the Central Asian countries in the areas of economy, finance, and energy.

There were no direct international relations between Japan and the countries of Central Asia in the past; contacts occurred only sporadically and within the framework of initiatives controlled by Moscow. Representatives of Central Asian republics, including Uzbekistan, occasionally participated in exchange visits to Japan. For example, during the 1920s, Japan and Uzbekistan established academic exchanges. Japan's economy was actively developing at the time, with the state playing a leading role in market formation. In the 1930s, Uzbekistan adopted elements of Japanese expertise in sericulture, importing and adapting various breeds of silkworms and mulberry trees.

Soviet propaganda widely covered the tragedy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, frequently reminding students of the use of nuclear weapons in 1945 (Rakhimov, 2014). However, information regarding Japan's post-war development – including its political, social, and economic life – remained extremely limited and was largely confined to superficial references to the country's economic growth.

Japan's foreign policy in Central Asia has undergone several key phases, each reflecting shifts in Japan's foreign economic and political interests as well as its evolving engagement with regional and global powers (see Fig. 1).

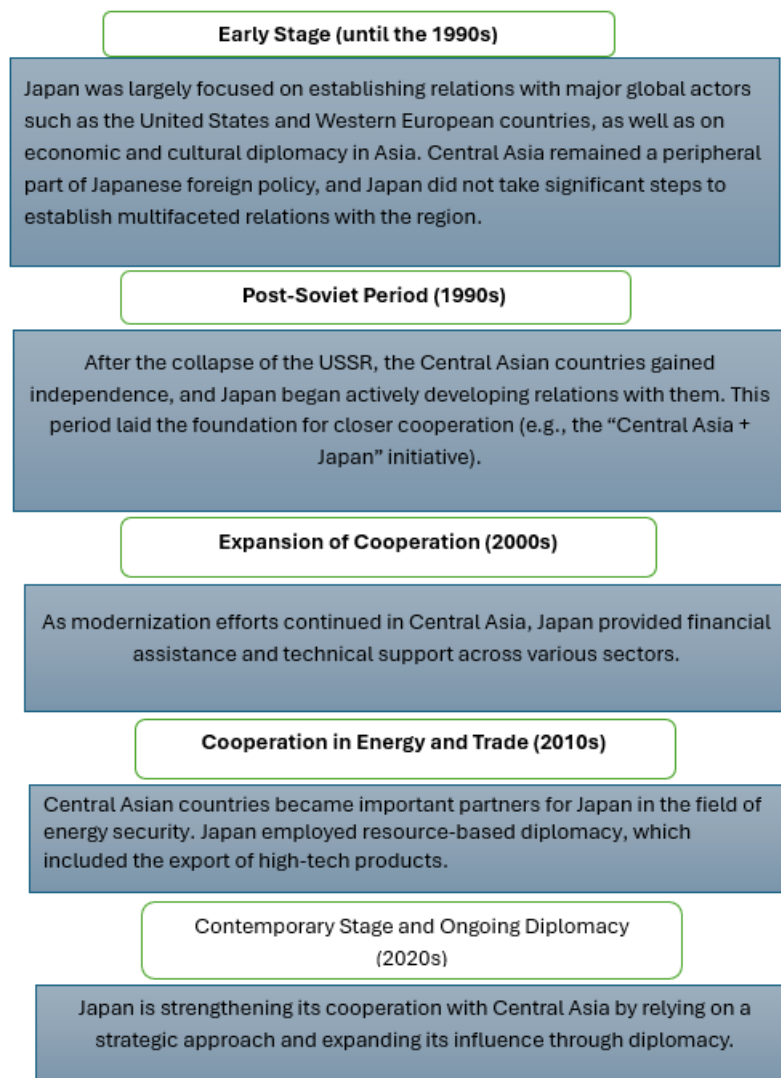


Fig. 1. Key Stages of Japan's Foreign Policy in Central Asia

Following the end of the Cold War, Japan actively sought a new foreign policy strategy aligned with the transformation of the bipolar international system. In the aftermath of World War II, Japan adopted what later became known as the "Yoshida Doctrine," named after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, the architect of Japan's postwar foreign policy. This doctrine emphasized a strategic alliance with the United States and rapid economic development while maintaining limited military capabilities. It guided Japan's national security policy until the early 1970s, during which Japan achieved significant economic growth, becoming the world's second-largest economy, and developed a military posture focused on deterring the Soviet Union. Over time, the doctrine evolved into a classical national interest strategy encompassing three main components: domestic (public security), military (national defense), and foreign policy (global peace and stability) (Kuanbay, 2023).

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After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Japan swiftly established diplomatic relations with the newly independent states and initiated cooperative endeavors. Responding to the changing geopolitical landscape, Japan adjusted its foreign policy course and was among the first countries to recognize the independence of Central Asian nations, establishing diplomatic ties and seeking to develop cooperation across various sectors. Initially, due to the complexities of the Soviet Union's dissolution, Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs classified these states as part of Europe and the Newly Independent States. However, in 1992, Japan officially recognized the countries of the region, and by 2025, it will mark 33 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Tokyo and the capitals of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

In the 1990s, Japan proposed an alternative model of economic development for Central Asia, focusing on the modernization of traditional structures and support for priority sectors. This approach contrasted with Western recommendations centered on market reforms and liberalization. Japan aimed to formulate a unique diplomatic strategy in Eurasia, prioritizing cooperation with the newly independent Central Asian republics. Japan's collaboration with Uzbekistan during the 1990s, amid its policy of gradual reforms, exemplified Tokyo's support for development models distinct from "shock therapy." This was particularly evident through the so-called "intellectual assistance for development." Studies indicate that during this period, some Japanese officials advising Central Asian governments endorsed Uzbekistan's gradualism as an alternative reform approach to shock therapy (Murashkin, 2024, pp.23-24).

Overall, Japan's foreign policy in the 1990s concentrated on defining its role in shaping a new world order. During this period, cooperation with the United Nations expanded beyond Japan's traditional "economic diplomacy." While maintaining its strategic partnership with the United States as a key priority, Japan actively developed new regional initiatives and enhanced multilateral diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region (Dobrinskaya, 2018, p.29). These shifts indicated the country's aspiration to liberalize its foreign policy strategy further.

In the 1990s, Japan intensified its "soft power" policy in Central Asia, which included providing Official Development Assistance (ODA). This period saw Japan strengthening ties with regions, including Central Asia, through concessional loans, grants, and technical cooperation. ODA was extended on a bilateral basis directly to individual developing countries and encompassed concessional loans (ODA loans and other programs), as well as grants and technical cooperation (Dadabayev, 20216). Through Japanese ODA, significant infrastructure projects were implemented in Central Asia, such as the modernization of airports in Uzbekistan, construction of the Tashguzar-Kumkurgan railway (Uzbekistan), reconstruction of the airport in Astana (Kazakhstan), and modernization of railway transport in Turkmenistan. These and other projects contributed to the development of the region's transportation infrastructure.

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A key aspect of Japan's diplomatic activity in Central Asia has been its involvement in Afghanistan's reconstruction and regional stability support. Since the onset of the international counterterrorism operation in Afghanistan, Japan has been a leading donor for the country's reconstruction, conducting replenishment activities in the Indian Ocean involving the Maritime Self-Defense Forces. Japan has also actively participated in developing infrastructure, healthcare, and education in Afghanistan through its ODA program. These efforts are part of Japan's broader foreign policy in the region, aimed at strengthening economic and political ties with Central Asian states. The development of transport communications and participation in international projects with Afghanistan present additional opportunities for economic cooperation, aligning with Japan's long-term strategy in Central Asia, which includes "soft power" and support for regional economic growth.

The utilization of "soft power" remains a vital instrument of Japanese diplomacy in the region. For instance, in 2024, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the National University of Tajikistan signed a memorandum of understanding to implement the "JICA Chair" program. This program involves inviting prominent Japanese lecturers, studying Japan's experience, conducting joint research, and exchanging educational resources. This initiative demonstrates Japan's efforts to enhance cultural influence in Tajikistan, continuing to develop humanitarian and educational cooperation as part of its long-term strategy in Central Asia. (*Япония поможет Таджикистану улучшить водоснабжение, обучить госслужащих и развить малый бизнес | Tajikistan News ASIA-Plus, 2024*).

Until 1996, Central Asia was not considered a priority in Japan's foreign policy. Unlike major players such as Russia and China, Japan was not actively engaged in influencing Central Asia. The search for effective interaction mechanisms began with the Obuchi mission in 1996, when parliamentarian and future Prime Minister Keizō Obuchi visited Azerbaijan and Central Asia, leading to the promotion of expanded Japanese involvement in the region. In 1997, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, in his speech on Eurasian diplomacy known as the "Silk Road" concept, introduced this idea in a geopolitical context, integrating Central Asia, China, Russia, and Japan into a system of interdependence (Dadabaev, 2021). This diplomatic strategy encompassed three main directions:

1. Political Dialogue;
2. Economic Cooperation;
3. Cooperation in the Areas of Nuclear Non-Proliferation, Democratization, and Maintenance of Regional Stability.

The "Silk Road Diplomacy" also provided the Japanese government with an opportunity to establish systematic support for Central Asia, taking into account both security concerns and the region's economic development prospects (Marat & Timur, 2007). The term "Silk Road" has been widely utilized by various states in their

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engagement with Central Asia. Although the Silk Road is often perceived in foreign policy as a static concept, T. Dadabaev (2018) argues that the term embodies a variety of approaches and strategies used by major powers to engage with Central Asia. He also emphasizes that these Silk Road strategies initially emerged as responses to the collapse of the Soviet Union and were aimed at mitigating its adverse consequences.

Between 2000 and 2010, Japanese foreign policy faced numerous challenges and opportunities. During this period, Japan aimed to strengthen strategic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific region while coping with the aftermath of the global financial crisis and increasing tensions with neighboring countries. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks, when military power assumed a more prominent role in international relations, Japan's foreign policy underwent significant changes. The liberal approaches characteristic of the 1990s were relegated, and Japan focused on reinforcing its alliance with the United States, which resulted in an enhanced role within this partnership. In response to new global security challenges, Japan also intensified its foreign policy initiatives in Central Asia, focusing on several key factors. Kyrgyzstan became the first Central Asian country to draw Japan's attention; however, subsequent bilateral relations remained moderate. The Japanese Embassy in Bishkek opened only in 2003, after similar missions had already been established in Tashkent, Almaty, and Dushanbe. The Kyrgyz Embassy in Tokyo was established in 2004.

During this period, one of the central objectives of Japan's foreign policy was the pursuit of regional economic integration. This was reflected in Japan's accession to the ASEAN+3 framework program in 2002, aiming to stimulate trade and investment among member states. A notable development in Japan's Central Asia policy was the initiation of the six-party "Central Asia plus Japan" (or "5+1") format in August 2004, encompassing Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This new phase of relations was officially marked by the Japanese government's proposal to establish the "Central Asia + Japan" dialogue, which was well received by the regional states. The first meeting under this framework took place in Astana in August 2004, resulting in a joint statement that outlined the fundamental principles of cooperation: respect for national, ethnic, and cultural diversity; a balance between competition and cooperation; and openness in partnership relations. The proposed mechanism did not replace bilateral engagements but was intended to enhance and expand Japan's cooperation with the region. Following this new approach, a second ministerial meeting of the "Central Asia + Japan" dialogue was held in 2006 (Nurseitova & Ashinova, 2024).

Key areas of cooperation endorsed at the meeting included political dialogue, business promotion, and intellectual exchange. Additionally, an Action Plan was adopted, detailing the types and content of contributions that Japan intended to make. The primary instruments for implementing the Action Plan were Japan's Official Development Assistance (ODA) programs, especially technical cooperation, grants, and concessional loans.

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Over time, the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialogue became less active. The reluctance of Central Asian states to advance intra-regional cooperation limited Japan’s capacity to act as a catalyst in this process. Subsequent ministerial meetings occurred less frequently: the third (with Turkmenistan participating for the first time) was held in 2010, followed by the fourth and fifth meetings in 2012 and 2014, respectively. Nonetheless, informal “intellectual dialogues” in the form of expert and civil society discussions on various topics continued to take place regularly.

M. Rakhimov (2014) highlighted that the “Central Asia plus Japan” initiative represents an excellent platform for multilateral cooperation, but stressed the importance of clearly defining specific objectives and measures, gradually expanding the scale and scope of collaboration with the involvement of all interested countries and relevant international and regional organizations.

One of the most significant instruments of Japan’s foreign policy in Central Asia has been the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), which began its active engagement in the region during the 1990s. As part of its mission, the agency focused on promoting stability and development by designing and implementing programs aimed at improving living standards, developing infrastructure, and supporting education and healthcare. In the 2000s, JICA established offices in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, and set up a contact office in Kazakhstan.

In August 2006, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi conducted his first official visit to Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – as part of Japan’s broader effort to establish a coherent foreign policy toward this strategically important and resource-rich region. During his visit to Kazakhstan, a memorandum of cooperation was signed concerning the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the development of uranium deposits. In Uzbekistan, in addition to discussions on energy cooperation, the parties agreed to initiate a framework for future negotiations across various areas, including Japan’s support for educational initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Uzbek students in Japanese academic institutions (Gao & Li, 2022).

Since the return of Shinzo Abe to power in 2012, Japan’s economic diplomacy toward Uzbekistan has intensified significantly, reflecting a more pronounced shift in priorities. This includes a substantial increase in aid to the Uzbek government, a focus on bilateral economic and trade cooperation, and flexible use of the regional framework known as “Central Asia + Japan.”

While partnership with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has developed robustly, including collaborations in nuclear energy and educational programs, Japan’s presence in Turkmenistan remains limited and is primarily concentrated in the energy sector. For example, only six Japanese companies are registered in Turkmenistan, focusing mainly on natural gas exploitation.

Since 2015, Japan has significantly escalated its engagement in Central Asia, driven by concerns over China’s growing influence in the region, especially following

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the launch of the “Silk Road Economic Belt” initiative. Japan has aimed to balance China’s economic expansion in Central Asia (Troitsky & Kim, 2017, p. 85). During Prime Minister Abe’s visit in 2015, prospects for Japanese involvement in constructing gas processing plants and other facilities were discussed, though these talks yielded few tangible results. However, Uzbekistan, particularly after 2016 (the post-Karimov period), has attracted increased Japanese interest due to changes in the political climate, the government’s proactive stance on foreign investment, and strong pro-Japanese sentiment among the population, as confirmed by various sociological surveys.

Trade relations between Japan and Uzbekistan are shaped by Uzbekistan’s landlocked geography, which restricts its rich natural gas exports to neighboring countries via pipelines. Nevertheless, the country holds significant reserves of uranium and rare metals that attract Japanese investment. Additionally, Uzbekistan exports agricultural goods to Japan, notably cotton and cotton-based products. Japan, in turn, exports machinery, equipment, electronics, and medical technology to Uzbekistan (Murashkin, 2019).

Uzbekistan actively participates in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), supports its strategic objectives, and seeks to fully utilize the organization’s potential amidst its ongoing transformation (Rakhimov & Rakhimov, 2023).

Beyond the activities of the 24 Japanese companies registered in Uzbekistan, bilateral relations have been reinforced through a significant number of Japanese ODA-funded projects, such as power plant modernization, and the presence of the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) office in Tashkent. JETRO’s primary mission is to collect and disseminate information to Japanese businesses interested in the Uzbek market. In line with ODA priorities, which often shape corporate investment directions, Uzbekistan attracts both public and private Japanese investment in areas such as modernization of economic infrastructure (transport, energy), human capital development, and institutional reforms that promote the emergence of a market economy and industrial growth.

The visit of the President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Japan in 2019 provided a significant impetus to the strengthening of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. Uzbekistan has traditionally supported Japan on the international stage, particularly within the framework of the United Nations, and is committed to continuing this support in the future.

Japan, with its predominantly mountainous terrain (75% of the territory), is recognized as a hub for mountain tourism. Activities such as rock climbing, speleotourism, rafting, and alpine skiing are highly developed. Uzbekistan, possessing similar potential, is actively developing these types of tourism and is interested in Japan’s experience. The country is attracting investments in tourism infrastructure using a cluster-based approach and establishing free economic zones. Foreign investors, including Japanese entrepreneurs, benefit from significant tax incentives. One example

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is a project in the Jizzakh region focused on developing tourism infrastructure around the Aydar-Arnasay Lakes, including beach recreation in the “Orom Kirgogi” zone. Additionally, all-season resorts are being established in the Zaamin district with the involvement of both local and foreign investors (Ktaybekov, 2024, p. 177).

Overall, Uzbekistan and Japan are currently deepening cooperation across all spheres. Both parties advocate for increasing mutual trade volumes, expanding investment, technological, financial-technical, and tourism collaboration. Japan highly values and fully supports Uzbekistan’s regional policy aimed at creating an atmosphere of trust and good neighborliness in Central Asia and is eager to assist Uzbekistan and other regional countries in liberalizing their economies, integrating the region into a unified economic space, and accessing broader markets.

The year 2022 marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the Central Asian countries and their international partners. As part of this occasion, the eighth meeting of foreign ministers within the “Central Asia + Japan” dialogue was held via videoconference on April 15. The discussions focused on enhancing cooperation between Central Asian countries and Japan, including joint responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening border controls, regional security issues, and collaboration on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (Dmitrieva, 2022, p. 479). The participants agreed to continue working in these areas and identified new opportunities for partnership. Uzbekistan presented a series of initiatives for future cooperation, including the creation of a joint poverty reduction program based on Japan’s “One Village, One Product” initiative; promotion of a regional “Green Agenda” for Central Asia; transformation of the Japanese Digital University in Tashkent into a Central Asian Digital University to broaden educational opportunities in the digital sphere and implement joint educational programs, among other forward-looking proposals.

Amidst increasing global competition, Japan aims to expand its economic ties and secure reliable sources of resources. With strong connections to the West, Japan seeks to become an influential actor in Eurasia, and strengthening relations with Central Asia can offer it important strategic advantages. The historical and cultural proximity between Japan and Central Asia has served as a foundation for its public diplomacy in the region. Japan presents its post-war development model as an example for Central Asian countries, emphasizing aspects such as economic growth, democratization with Eastern characteristics, advanced technologies, and environmental protection.

Japanese scholars believe that the development of a transcontinental transportation network would help integrate Central Asia into global trade and facilitate access to the region’s natural resources. Like many other states, Japan actively supports the accelerated development of transport corridors traversing China, Turkey, and potentially Iran or Afghanistan and Pakistan (Rakhimov, 2014). Future transportation projects are expected to further strengthen economic ties between Central Asia and Japan.

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The historical and cultural affinity between Japan and Central Asia has underpinned Japan's social influence and public diplomacy in the region. Japan actively leverages future-oriented perspectives in its relations with Central Asia, offering its post-war development trajectory as a benchmark for the region. On this basis, it highlights the most appealing aspects of its image, such as economic prosperity, democratization with local characteristics, cutting-edge technology, environmental stewardship, and attention to socio-economic issues. Nevertheless, Japan's share in the multilateral relations pursued by Central Asian countries remains relatively limited, necessitating a more proactive policy and intensified efforts to strengthen its position in the region.

Conclusion

The establishment of relations between Japan and Central Asia is rooted in a long history of trade, cultural, and humanitarian ties dating back to ancient times. Despite the geographical distance and the absence of a military presence, Tokyo has managed to build stable and enduring partnerships with the countries of Central Asia by focusing on economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and humanitarian initiatives. For example, Japan has contributed to the construction and modernization of transportation and energy infrastructure in Uzbekistan, as well as supported sustainable development and environmental projects. Alongside Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan is viewed by Japan as a key strategic partner in the region, and Tokyo has expressed its willingness to expand bilateral cooperation across various sectors.

Overall, Japanese diplomacy has successfully established a regular political dialogue with the countries of Central Asia and earned a favorable reputation in the region. Japan has positioned itself as a country effectively promoting "soft power" through initiatives in education, science, environmental protection, and agricultural development. Despite the deepening of ties, Japan has, for a long time, deliberately avoided politicizing its relations with Central Asia, adopting a strategically modest role behind the broader diplomatic initiatives of the United States.

Thus, despite external challenges, Japan continues to serve as an important partner for Central Asian nations, demonstrating flexibility in its foreign policy and a commitment to long-term cooperation that promises mutual benefits for both Japan and the region.

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