

Topical issues of Japan's strategy in Central Asia: view from Kazakhstan

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Abstract: The collapse of the bipolar system of international relations led to change in the geopolitical and geo-economic worldview. Leading experts actively began to say that the center of the world economy had shifted from the Euro-Atlantic space to that of Asia. Significant changes on the political map affected the Eurasian continent. Primarily, this was due to the collapse of the Soviet Union on the territory of which new independent states appeared. A new player represented by the Central Asian region appeared on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Since then, the political and economic development of the region began to arouse keen interest of not only the world's economic centers such as the U.S., China and the EU, but also the leading regional powers such as Japan. Increasing role of Central Asia in the system of international relations makes it objectively necessary to understand the policy of the leading states, including Japan, in the region in the twenty-first century. Accordingly, the objective of the research is to study the formation and development of Japan's policy toward the countries of Central Asia and to determine its prospects.

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1. Introduction

Japan began to show a political interest in the countries of Central Asia in 1991, when they had acquired their independence. With the formation of 'a new world order' Japan, as well as many other global economic players, had to change its foreign policy. A threat of communism existed no longer for Japan, which was the main military and political ally of the U.S. in the Asia-Pacific region. New states were created on the territory of the former Soviet Union, and it was necessary to support them.

The activity in the Central Asian region after the end of the 'Cold War' is a completely new direction in the foreign policy of Japan. Yet, Japan's policy in Central Asia has already become one of the most important components of its global foreign policy as, in addition to the undisputed presence of economic-strategic interest in the region, it is directly linked to the problem of qualitative change in its role and status in international relations.

Seeing the U.S., the EU and East Asia countries' interest in the Central Asian region, Japan could not have remained passive for a long time, as its welfare largely depends on the development of new sources of energy, as well as on stable and secure ways to deliver them. This interest made Japan strengthen its presence in Central Asia at the beginning of the XXI century.

In this connection, there arose a need to study the features of Japan's policy in Central Asia, the areas of regional and bilateral cooperation between

Japan and these countries. The importance of the article lies in the fact that it is written by a representative of one of the Central Asian nations from the point of view of internal evaluation.

In studying Japan's policy toward the countries of Central Asia, the official sources of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Central Asian states have been used as the main source base. In particular, annual "Bluebooks" on Diplomacy [1], information on the section of bilateral relations, as well as a separate section devoted to "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialogue [2] placed on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were used as an open source.

The statistics, chronicles of important events on the official websites of the Ministries and Departments of Central Asian states were of particular significance for the study.

When analyzing Japan's policy towards the Central Asian region, the author referred to the research articles, among which the works of Japanese politicians and scholars are of particular importance. So the work of the former Japanese Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone deals with the major domestic and foreign policy directions of this country, the essence of its state strategy at the present stage [3]. Studies of Uyama [4], Dadabayev [5], and Takeshi [6] examine the peculiarities of Japan's policy in Central Asia. The authors challenge the existence of a clear strategy of Japan towards Central Asia.

To study the formation and development of Japan's policy, research works of Russian and foreign authors were very important. Those of Hickok [7], Christopher Len [8], a joint study conducted by the Institute of Central Asia and the Caucasus [9] present the views of the Western scientific circles on the idea of the restoration of the Great Silk Road. It is necessary to mention the works of Russian authors such as I. Komissina [10], O. Arin [11], O. Dobrinskaya [12], O. Reznikova [13], and A. Petrov [14].

Central Asian researchers, such as E. Usabaliev [15-16], K.K. Tokayev [17], A. Akaev [18], B. Sultanov [19], M. Laumulin [20], R. Sadykova [21] have also contributed the study of the issues of bilateral cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and Japan. All these works provide a complete picture of the formation and development of cooperation between the Central Asian states and Japan in various fields. However, at the present time, especially in domestic science, there are very few works on the integrated analysis of Japan's strategy towards the Central Asian states, which began to manifest in strengthening the bilateral cooperation and regional interaction.

2. Material and Methods

In the content of this article, the methods of analysis and synthesis, logic, and systematic method were used. In the study, scientific methods such as observation, study of documents, structural-functional, problem-chronological approaches and analytical methods were used, although it should be noted that the difference between them is quite conventional.

Taking into account that the future of Central Asia is determined by the tendencies of the world development, the study was conducted with the use of the methods of a particular branch of knowledge, namely the internationally juridical forecasting. For example, in the analysis of the present stage of evolution of Japan's strategy, objective and time analogy methods, the collective expert assessment and scenario, the method of possible or desirable model have also proved themselves useful. In the study, special attention will be paid to descriptive and prescriptive (normative) prognoses.

On the whole, theoretical and methodological background to the thesis work is general methodological principles that enabled to study Japan's strategy towards Central Asian states comprehensively and objectively.

3. Main part.

As early as at the initial stage of establishing their statehood, the Central Asian states (Kazakhstan,

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) encountered numerous difficulties of economic and socio-political nature, self-overcoming of which only through internal resources of the republics looked quite problematic. Accordingly, reliance on obtaining external economic assistance and establishment of broad international cooperation, especially with the major industrialized nations of the world, were considered by the leaders of these countries as the most important area to find ways out of the situation as it had developed.

Among the countries main hopes to be put upon (the USA, the EU states, etc.), the young states showed particular interest in Japan as a leading financial donor for the Third World countries.

In retrospect, Japan's relations with the countries of Central Asia had quite clearly defined stages, the change of which led to a significant change in the priorities of the policy pursued by Japanese leaders and business community in relation to these countries [10].

Most researchers who have studied Japan's policy towards the Central Asian states before 2000 distinguish three phases. Our estimation allows distinguishing four ones, as the period since 2001 is characterized by increased presence of Japan in the region.

In *the first phase*, which is attributable to the period that came immediately after the new states of Central Asia acquired independence, Japan, claiming to be the universally recognized leader of the Asia-Pacific region, was primarily concerned about the problems of peace and stabilization in this potentially conflict-ridden region of Asia. Establishment of diplomatic relations served as the first step for establishment of cooperation. On December 28, 1991, the Japanese government declared its recognition of state sovereignty of all the five new Central Asian states - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. And on January 26, 1992, in Moscow, the exchange of letters on establishing diplomatic relations with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was done, and in February and April, 1992, relations with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan were established.

The geographical location of five emerged independent states, forming the Central Asian region, allowed Japan to take a comprehensive approach in establishing and further development of relations. It included, first of all, establishing the minimum essential relations with the countries of the region, reconnaissance visits in 1992-1994, as well as sensing the political positions of the regimes established in respect of the most important problems of contemporary international relations [14].

The first Japanese ambassador to Uzbekistan, the first step toward enlarging Japan's presence in Central Asia was the visit of a delegation headed by Chino Tadao, former Vice Minister of Financing and International Affairs of the Ministry of Finance (MOF), in February 1992, and the first visit of Uzbek president Islam Karimov to Japan in May 1992. These visits reflected Japanese support for Uzbekistan; when Uzbekistan got into difficulties by its strict macro-economic policy introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Japan started administering grants to Uzbekistan and for other development assistance [6, p. 69].

In this regard, Japan was building its relations with the Central Asian countries on the standard model of relations between developed and developing states. When the CA republics became independent in 1991, the expectations of both the CA governments and Japan regarding the further development of relations were high. However, as is often emphasized, Japanese involvement in the CA region remained largely confined to Official Development Assistance (ODA) disbursements and various forms of economic and technical assistance [5].

On January 1, 1993, largely due to the lobbying activities of Japan, the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reckoned all the five Central Asian republics of the former USSR among developing countries, so they were afforded an opportunity to get outside help.

The transition to the *second phase* of development of Japan's relations with Central Asian countries was largely due to aggravation of the economic crisis, which engulfed these countries and resulted in a sharp decline in their exports to Japan. In this regard, the Japanese government found it possible to introduce a system of preferential tariffs to encourage import of goods from the countries of the region, hoping to intensify their foreign trade and economic reform in general; as in this case, they were given the opportunity to receive at least the minimum foreign exchange resources. In the first half of the nineties, Kyrgyzstan out of the Central Asian countries drew the most attention of the Japanese government. President Askar Akayev at that time was generally considered by Japanese officials to be the most reform-oriented among CIS leaders. However, the Kyrgyz government was not prepared for the implementation of large assistance projects because of its small-sized economy, and gradually, the priority of the Japanese government was transferred to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the two most populous Central Asian states. If Kazakhstan is important due to its large oil reserves, Uzbekistan

occupies a geopolitically vital place at the center of the Eurasian continent. If the situation becomes unstable in this country, it will easily spread to neighboring states, affecting the balance-of-power in the eastern half of Eurasia. In 1995, Japan accorded its first large yen-loans to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to improve their communication systems. Since then, it has endeavored to maintain parity in the scale of ODA conferred to both countries. [Silk Road diplomacy]

In the *third phase* of development of relations with the countries of Central Asia, the political and economic elite of Japan realized the necessity of making a new strategy for their development. With the announcement of the "Silk road Diplomacy" in 1997 came the second wave of Japan's involvement in Central Asia. By 1997, Japanese diplomats had realized the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus and Central Asia and that Japan should not fall behind in filling the vacuum in this region. They calculated that Japan's clout there would benefit its Diplomacy vis-à-vis Russia, China, and the Middle East, though they could not specify what kind of concrete benefit would be brought about.

The Department of European and Oceanic Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) of Japan formulated three principles which were later named "Silk road Diplomacy" and gradually started promulgating them. Toward the end of June and the beginning of July of 1997, Obuchi Keizo, a member of the Lower House who became Prime Minister in 1998, headed a large delegation numbering approximately sixty people consisting of politicians, government officials, businessmen, and academics to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan [9].

This strategy was launched under the name Eurasian diplomacy by the then Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto in July 1997.

Eurasian diplomacy is Japan's foreign-policy strategy in relation to the countries of Central Asia, Russia, China, and the Transcaucasia. The initiator of the concept is the chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary League, a member of the House of Representatives of Japan's parliament M. Suzuki. It was officially announced by Ryutaro Hashimoto, who was the then Prime Minister of Japan, to the representatives of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives (Keizai Doyukai) in July 1997 [11, p. 89].

In developing this strategy, the Japanese specialists emphasized that the rich oil and gas resources of the Caspian region were becoming an important factor on the world market of the energy resources that were of interest to Japan; the countries of the region could serve as a bridge linking Eurasian states by their communications; the active support

rendered to the republics of Central Asia and the Transcaucasia in the process of nation-building would be of great importance for the development of Japan's relations not only with those new independent states, but also with their neighbors - Russia, China and Islamic states, and that would eventually allow Japan to expand its political influence in the Eurasian region in the twenty-first century [22].

In accordance with the Eurasian concept, Japan's relations with the countries of the Central Asian region should be based on three key areas:

- Political dialogue, contributing to the deepening of trust and mutual understanding;
- Economic cooperation, including development of natural resources;
- Achieving peace in the region through non-proliferation of nuclear weapon, democratization and stabilization.

It was also noted that the support from Japan should become an important factor in enhancing intra-regional cooperation in the establishment of transport, communication and energy supply systems, as well as in the development of energy resources in Central Asia [23].

The Eurasian doctrine of Japan in relation to the countries of Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, has become an important impetus to the development of bilateral relations. The ideas of the concept of 'Eurasian diplomacy' were also implemented during the subsequent visits and speeches of prominent public figures. To fill its new foreign policy with specific content, the Japanese government adopted a plan, known as the 'Program of Action for the diplomacy of the Silk Road.' It involves the development of broad political connections, comprehensive economic cooperation, and support in the transition to the market economy [24].

The increased role of Washington, which is the main military and political ally of Tokyo, in the region caused a new wave of interest in Central Asia. This marked the beginning of the fourth phase of Japan's policy toward Central Asian states. Yet, former Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, in his speech during the Boao Forum of China (PRC) on April 12, 2002, said that it was necessary to develop relations with the countries of the Central Asian region that have significant energy potential, ensuring Asia's needs for energy. In July 2002, Senior Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, S. Sugiura, headed the 'energy mission of the Silk Road', paid a visit to Kazakhstan. The members of the 'energy mission' were provided with ample opportunity to hold meetings in the President's Administration of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Government, the Ministers of Energy and Mineral

Resources, Industry and Trade of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

An equally important factor, which resulted in the revision of the Japanese strategy in the region, was the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in June 2001. The emergence of this new center of power highlighted the need to strengthen the Japanese position in the region [12].

It's safe to say that the Eurasian doctrine of Hashimoto laid the foundation for other new projects and concepts of Japan in relation to the countries of Central Asia. At that time, the future form of Japan's involvement in Central Asian affairs was a subject of much discussion among Japanese officials. One option was to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). But the consensus among Japanese officials was that if Japan joined this mechanism as the only non-socialist country, it might end up being merely used by the members, and that without the involvement of Western countries, SCO will not become an effective organization anyway. Another option was to hold a joint meeting with the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO). However, CACO did not seem a reliable body – and because Russia was accepted as a member in May 2004. The only viable choice for Japan was to therefore launch a new forum "Central Asia Plus Japan." The model was ASEAN + 3 (Japan, China, and South Korea). This form would ensure flexibility for Japan; while the door is not closed for the participation of other countries, Japan could forgo cumbersome coordination with a large number of participants, at least for the time being. [8]

The 'Central Asia plus Japan' Dialogue, launched in Astana in 2004, is an example of that. Creating this dialogue indicates the intention of Japan to play a greater role in the region. Currently, The 'Central Asia plus Japan' Dialogue has already established a reputation as an effective form of cooperation and effective mechanism for deepening political and economic ties in the vast Eurasian region. Japan has clearly defined the Central Asian region as a strategically important one. This shows the increasing role of Central Asia in Japan's foreign policy [21].

The second ministerial meeting was held in light of the new vision of the region indicated by Minister for Foreign Affairs Taro Aso who proclaimed the concept "Central Asia as a corridor of peace and stability." Its basic principles include a broad approach to the region, taking into account Afghanistan and Pakistan, support an inclusive regional cooperation, as well as the partnership based on universal values (democracy, market economy, human rights, rule of law) [12]. According to T. Aso's concept, a wide space that goes beyond the

traditional boundaries of the region was supposed to be the “corridor of peace and stability”, and the transport infrastructure (so-called “southern route”), as well as the pipeline connecting Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan was to play a major role in its creation. Such an interpretation – “a broad approach to the region” – resonates with the American concept of “Greater Central Asia” [25].

Recently, Japan held the fourth ministerial meeting of the ‘Central Asia plus Japan’ Dialogue in Tokyo. The event was not ignored by the five Central Asian republics and ministers of foreign affairs were there in full force. The participants expressed their desire to develop the Japanese-Central Asian relationship and assured that they would in every possible way strengthen international cooperation. In the long term, they came to an agreement that Japan would allocate \$700 million for the implementation of joint projects. The discussion of regional security issues and joint assistance to Afghanistan was also an important part of the multilateral dialogue.

Japan, despite its huge public debt and the threat of economic recession, remains quite attractive to the former post-Soviet states [26]. Recently Japan has decided to allocate \$ 700 million to the five Central Asian countries to support them in the development of natural gas and rare-earth minerals deposits [Japan gives \$700 million to 5 Central Asian countries]. On November 10, 2012 in Tokyo, the then Japanese Foreign Minister Koichiro Gomba met with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan and promised them Financial Support. Thus Japan aimed to reduce resource dependence on China due to the recent aggravation of relations with this country over the disputed islands. Pursuing the same goal, Japan started to support Kazakhstan in the field of production of rare-earth metals. This resulted in constructing a works in Stepnogorsk. Furthermore, Japan took a special interest in the above countries, which are rich in essential energy resources, after an accident had occurred at the ‘Fukushima-1’ plant. All the reasons demonstrate the activation of Japan’s policy toward the countries of Central Asia.

4. Results.

Thus, the main components of the Japan’s strategy in Central Asia are: economic, political cooperation and humanitarian issues resolution. Tokyo is increasing its economic, political and cultural links with Central Asian countries. The idea of the possibility of Japan’s participation in the regional organizations of Central Asia (in particular, SCO) in any capacity, voiced by some Japanese political scientists, seems to be interesting and promising. In general, the states of Central Asia

could support this idea. But the situation in the SCO and, being considered more widely, in this part of the Eurasian continent is determined by two major players - Russia and China, whose relationships with Japan are rather complicated now. It is clear that Japan will be more or less support major transportation, communication and infrastructure projects in Kazakhstan, Central Asia, Russia’s Siberia, and possibly in the western part of China because of its huge economic impact, as Japan’s economic interests in Central Asia are caused by the presence of natural resources in the region.

In general, the energy factor is becoming increasingly important in the relations with the countries of the region. At the present stage, the diversification problem of sources of energy resources, primarily oil, import has turned into a key element of Japan’s energy strategy. The Caspian oil is the matter of particular importance for them. Here, for the Japanese government, the priority lies not in the political games of the allies, but in the pragmatic promotion of the projects of its business circles, which are primarily interested in the economic pros from participating in the projects of development of strategic raw materials. (Energy Security of Japan and Caspian oil AAls) The “Obuchi Mission” (1997); Hashimoto’s “Eurasia Diplomacy” speech (1997); “Silk Road Energy Mission” (2002); “Central Asia+Japan Dialogue” (2004, which became active in 2006); and Taro Aso’s “Silk Road Diplomacy” (2006, originally part of “Eurasia Diplomacy”) stress the need of Japan’s economic support to Central Asian countries, and cooperation with them in the area of natural resources development. It is noteworthy that, “many completed and ongoing development projects of transport network in Central Asia are funded by Japan and the Asian Development Bank”. These development projects will further connect Central Asia with Japan.

The participation of Japan in the broad economic process, covering the SCO region can’t be excluded either. Experts note the absence of significant contradictions in the U.S. and Japan’s policies toward Central Asian states. Being a part of the West, Japan shows solidarity with the overall Western strategy in Central Asia: it acts as a donor and is interested in maintaining stability in the region, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. A striking example is the creation of Central Asia plus Japan mechanism.

While the objectives of the Central Asia Plus Japan initiative complement those of the SCO member states, Japan also plays a positive role in the region as a balancing force against the SCO. To be realistic, however, it is unlikely that the initiative will ever have the same weight and presence as the SCO

has. As the US influence diminishes within the Central Asian region and the SCO consolidates and expands its membership, Japan will have an increasing geopolitical role to play within Eurasia as a counterbalance to the SCO. Its engagement in Central Asia will ultimately sway the geopolitical direction of Eurasia depending on how successful it is in influencing the Central Asian states, including Afghanistan, to its way of thinking [8].

It is likely that Uzbekistan signed an agreement on strategic partnership with Japan in July, 2002, similar to that signed with the United States, under pressure that the U.S. brought to bear upon Japan to further strengthen the special political relations. To enhance economic assistance to Uzbekistan, Japan signed an agreement on economic cooperation and promoting economic reforms in Uzbekistan. It is noteworthy that Uzbekistan is the only Central Asian country with which Japan has signed a separate agreement on economic cooperation. A. Kazantsev, whose point of view is very interesting, notes that Central Asia may interest the Japanese in terms of expanding the Asia-Pacific region and creating new routes linking it with Europe. In addition, the Land of the Rising Sun wants to position itself as a leader in this part of the world. For instance, it lobbied providing the Central Asian states with most-favored-nation status in trade with the United States. Japan is also interested in increasing the number of states supporting its claims to membership in the UN Security Council.

In general, as the author concludes, there is a certain contradiction in the objectives of Japan's policy in Central Asia. On the one hand, it is one of the representatives of the Coalition of Asian Pacific Countries (through the geographical position and economic interests), but on the other hand, it is an active member of the Western coalition in the framework of strategic partnership with the United States. Therefore, the "Japanese project" for Central Asia is highly uncertain [27].

Thus, at the present stage, there are no major contradictions and problems of fundamental nature, which could impede the active development of mutual cooperation, between Japan and the countries of Central Asia. The authority that Japan enjoys, in comparison with other countries, with the political establishment and the common people of Central Asia, is quite high. Japan's policy to create a positive image of the country and nation has yielded positive results in Central Asia. Japan's activities, covered in the media, also resonate favorably with the population and form an idea of Japan as a "good, friendly country that genuinely seeks to help countries in need." Thus, Central Asia is open for

Japan as wide as it is not open for any other country in the world [15].

But at the same time, getting rid of the legacy of the "cold war", making its policy more independent of the strategy of the West and more Asian and even Eurasian, Japan will face some geopolitical obstacles, main of whom are Russia and China. Japan conducts its strategy, according to which it is a part of the Western strategy, but in the economic affairs especially, the Japanese government acts as a leading player in the Asian-Pacific Region and pursues independent policy.

5. Discussion

However, in the scientific community there is an active debate regarding Japan's strategy in relation to the Central Asian countries. Thus, Professor T. Uyama (Hokkaido University), for example, calls into question the idea that Japan had an articulate strategy in relation to Kazakhstan and Central Asia. Professor Uyama explains the absence of such a strategy with the aftermath of the Second World War. He notes that "strategic thinking is lacking not only in Japan's policy in Central Asia, but, as often noted, throughout its foreign policy. Before the Second World War Japan's policy was rich with "strategy" and intrigue aimed at developing the Japanese Empire's sphere of influence, but defeat in war fundamentally changed the orientation of Japanese diplomacy. Japan, to a great extent, lost its military and diplomatic independence. The major priority became maintaining its alliance with the United States, despite occasional and ongoing differences with the United States in the sphere of economics. At the same time, in order to prevent a slide back into isolationism, Japan has attempted to maintain peaceful (although not necessarily close) relations with all countries of the world and, in particular, to avoid upsetting any of the superpowers or any of its neighboring countries. As a result, Japanese foreign policy has remained largely passive. Thus, for example, military problems are considered only in the framework of the Japanese-American alliance. Nor does Japan have its own vision of security in regions far from Japan, including Central Asia" [4].

Studying the origins of Japanese diplomacy in the region, the Japanese researcher compares the relations between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and his country. He notes that Tashkent was able to find an influential leader in the Ministry of Finance in the person of Sh. Takao who became a kind of patron, positively influencing the investment policies of Tokyo in Uzbekistan. M. Hickok (U.S. Air War College and Japanese Institute of Energy and Economy) writes that in July 1997 Hashimoto announced a new 'Eurasian diplomacy' in Japan,

aiming primarily at the energy sector. Tokyo had two objectives: to preserve the balance in view of power projects of Russia and China and to improve the position of Japan in the international arena. In 1999, there was an increase in intensity of the contacts between Tokyo and Uzbekistan that announced Japan as its strategic partner. At the same time, Japan became interested in the oil fields in Azerbaijan. In 1994, Japan National Oil Corporation (JNOC) sponsored the search for oil in the Aral Sea region of Kazakhstan. In May 1998, Chairman of the Japan Federation of Economic Organizations S. Toyoda visited Kazakhstan, where he held talks with Nazarbayev about the possibilities of Japanese investment [7]. As a result, Kazakhstan agreed to reform the law for Japanese small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The author emphasizes the Japanese interest in the idea to adapt the Asian economic model proclaimed by Kazakhstan, he writes that Nazarbayev rejected the ultimatum of the West, i.e. 'to follow the Anglo-Saxon model or remain with Russia and Iran'. Thus, according to Professor M.T. Laumullin, N. Nazarbayev and Islam Karimov regarded Japan as a model for modernization by non-US and non-European path, the cause of which was fear of the 'American arrogance and European economic imperialism', and that forced the leaders of the Central Asian region to seek alternatives to industrial upgrading [20]. Hickok makes a conclusion that for the Central Asian states, the choice no longer lies between the Turkish and Iranian models as it has been stated by Western leaders for a long time; in the new century, Tokyo obtains a chance for a strategic partnership and more independent foreign policy through its involvement in Eurasia.

In these latter days, experts challenge the existence of Japan's strategy toward Central Asia.

Professor T. Uyama explains Japan's lack of a coherent strategy towards Central Asia with economic reasons primarily. The vector of economic interests and relations of Japan is the U.S., the Asian part of the Pacific Ocean region and South-East Asia. From the economic point of view, Central Asia is of no interest to Tokyo. And the relationship between Japan and Kazakhstan illustrate this situation superiorly.

But the explanation of 'modesty' of Japan's claims to Central Asia lies in a different plane. As it is rightly noted by this author, Japan is not, unlike the United States and other members of the 'Big Game', a full-fledged geopolitical force. This explains why Tokyo is not seeking a massive presence in the region. Japan shows solidarity with the West as part of the overall Western strategy in Central Asia: it acts as a donor interested in maintaining the regional

stability, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and creation of a prosperous Asian community. Thus, Japan's interests in Central Asia are 'peripheral' by nature. Professor T. Uyama refers to the doctrine of so-called 'Eurasian diplomacy' put forward by Prime Minister Hashimoto some time ago. He distinguishes two components of this concept: first, the maintenance of good relations with Russia, and secondly, the search for 'new friends throughout Asia', including Central Asia. The concepts of Japan and Kazakhstan clearly show the discrepancy between the foreign policy priorities of the two countries. The Eurasian vector in Kazakhstan's understanding is the integration in the framework of the CIS and bent to Europe and other countries such as Turkey and Iran, lying in the field of European and Eurasian geopolitics [4].

Uyasa Takeshi, another Japanese author, noted that "The process of creating Eurasian diplomacy and the Central Asian and Japan dialogue has been an important movement in Japanese foreign policy, in which the challenge of including geopolitics-oriented ideas has been met. It is also represents a unique opportunity for Japan to search for a way for regional multilateralism because, as well as most Asian countries in alliance with the United States, Japan understands the importance of such bilateral, hub-and-spoke relations with the US, and depends on the security umbrella delivered by the US. Suffice it to say here that Japan has just started to learn how to establish its regional multilateralism, although the process may be native" [6].

There is also a point of view that relations with Central Asia can be called the best example of Japan's strategy of 'soft power', which is the use of a set of nonmilitary methods to protect its interests. Tokyo's attention to the socio-economic and humanitarian issues, the willingness to use its strong financial capabilities to their solutions, as well as non-interference in the internal politics, of course, appeals to the countries of the region.

According to O. Dobrinskaya, in the eight years of the existence of Dialogue with Central Asian countries, Japan has managed to strengthen its position in the region, to give a new dimension to relations with the countries in the region. In this case, the framework of the Dialogue is not considered as a substitute for bilateral cooperation, which is still playing a significant role in the discussion of the most important issues for Tokyo, such as access to natural resources [12].

According to Professor M. Laumullin, Tokyo regards the Eurasian doctrine as the priority of Asian component. Evaluating Tokyo's policy towards the CIS, the author from Kazakhstan states that it has been easier for Japan to find a common language

with the Asian republics of the former Soviet Union because of cultural mentality and historical traditions. Japan, in contrast to the West - the United States and the Europeans especially - does not attach such great importance to the issue of democracy and human rights. Its understanding of the issue differs from that of Brussels and Washington. In addition, there is no doubt that Japan, due to its geographical location, economic ties, is an Asian power. Its interests depend not only on what is happening in the other centers of economic power in the West, but also on the situation in the economy of China, in Southeast Asia, the Middle East that are an important source of energy [20].

Professor T. Dadabayev in his paper argues that Japanese foreign policy is generally trapped between idealist and pragmatic positions. In doing so, we conceptualize Japanese CA policy within the overall framework of Japanese policy toward Asia. On the one hand, Japan attempts to frame its involvement in the region using rhetoric about its contributions to regional development - without emphasizing the benefits Japan derives from this situation. On the other hand, Japanese policy makers face increasing pressure to connect their foreign relations with outcomes that benefit Japanese taxpayers. As a result of this dilemma, Japan's policy in CA is a hybrid of ideas and policies that are not properly understood in CA and are difficult to explain to the Japanese public from a cost-benefit perspective [5].

Thus, we can say that the Central Asian trend has an important place in the foreign policy of Japan. The establishment of strategic partnership with Uzbekistan, the formation of the dialogue mechanism 'Central Asia plus Japan', as well as economic cooperation is integral parts of Japan's strategy towards Central Asia.

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