



## Central Asia and Japan: Bilateral and multilateral relations

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### ABSTRACT

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s Central Asian nations and Japan established diplomatic relations and partnership began to increase steadily as manifested by the level of official contacts. In 1997 the “Silk Road” Diplomacy concept was formulated for Japan’s policy toward Central Asia.

In the beginning of 21st century we see activation of new actors including India, Korea and Japan in Central Asia, which were mainly welcomed in the region. Tokyo recognized the growing strategic importance of Central Asia in the context of international security and sought to play a more active role as an Asian nation in Eurasia.

During two decades Central Asian nations and Japan partnership began to increase steadily. Japan is one of the largest assistants to Central Asia in structural reforms and Japanese investments to the different aspects of region economy and transport communication add up to several billions. There are several areas of special interest to Japan in its relations with Central Asia, including cooperation in education, economic development of the region, political reforms, as well as energy resources.

Japan’s effort in creating the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialog is part of its multilateral diplomacy. At the same time there are some challenges and problems in Central Asia–Japan relations. However, there are potentialities for future bilateral and multilateral relations.

Japan like Korea, India and other countries has a strong positive image in Central Asia, which could be regarded as an additional factor for fostering partnership of Central and East Asia as well as interregional relation with the vast Asian continent and beyond.

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### 1. Introduction

In 1992 Japan and Central Asian nations established diplomatic relations and during two decades of partnership began to increase and in 1997 the “Silk Road” Diplomacy concept was formulated for Japan’s policy toward Central Asia.

At present Japan is one of the largest assistants to Central Asia in structural reforms and Japanese investments to the different aspects of region economy and transport communication add up to several billions. There are several areas of special interest to Japan in its relations with Central

Asia, including cooperation in education, economic development of the region, political reforms, as well as energy resources. In 2004 Japan initiated creation the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialog is part of its multilateral diplomacy.

There are a number of research papers and articles on the Central Asia and Japan relations, but the most interesting is the “Japan’s Silk Road Diplomacy. Paving the Road Ahead”, Silk Road collective Monograph edited by C. Len, T. Uyama, T. Hirose and published in the Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, Washington, D.C., in 2008. The monograph consists of very interesting papers on the different aspects of the Central Asia–Japan relations.

The current paper is based on the author’s research in Central Asia, on the survey among Central Asian experts, as well as interviews in Tokyo and research Slavic research center, University Hokkaido (Japan). The paper attempts to study from region perspective relations of Central Asia and Japan, dynamics of the bilateral relation, Japan and Central Asian multilateral cooperation, its limits and potential, perspective of wider partnership between Central and East Asia.

## 2. Establishing relations and formulating Japan’s strategy toward Central Asia

Central Asians and Japanese often refer to long history of trade, cultural and humanitarian relations that have taken place among countries and regions, located along the way Silk Road. Among examples referred to the rarities, made in Samarkand in the 13th century and founded in the ancient city of Nara, the historic capital of Japan. Also Buddhism, which in the sixth century, was moved to the Japan from Central Asia through China and Korea.

After WW2 thousands of Japanese war prisoners were deported to Central Asia, where they participated in the different reconstructions and had tolerant relations and attitude with and from local people (Zhukova, 2007. pp.62–71).

It should be noted that during the Soviet time, Central Asia and Japan were not involved in direct foreign relation, but only in framework Soviets center dominated approaches, there were some contacts of representatives of Central Asia Soviet republics, including Uzbekistan, to involve in different exchanges visits to Japan. Due to the Soviet propaganda the students were well informed that the first atomic bomb where used in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, but post-WW2 period of Japan political, social and economic development was not wildly informed exception very limited information on it’s economic progress.

Only in the post-Soviet era Central Asian nations and Japan started diplomatic, political and economic relations. Japan is among the first ones recognized and established diplomatic links with the new states of Central Asia and parties tried to develop relations in the different fields. Japanese Foreign Ministry classified them as a part of Europe and Newly Independent States due to be inconvenient to divide the former Soviet Union.

Tokyo realized that it had to become more active in the international arena. Japan saw an opportunity to carve out a special diplomatic role for itself in Eurasia, with

significant focus on the new (Central) Asian republics (Len, 2008. p.11).

According to the former Japan ambassador to Uzbekistan Kawato, Kyrgyzstan was the first to attract Japan’s attention, but 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. If Kazakhstan is important due to its large oil reserves, Uzbekistan occupies a geopolitically vital place at the center of the Eurasian continent (Kawato, 2008, p.16).

Watanabe Michio, Japanese Foreign Minister made a visit to Kazakhstan in 1992, and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Japan in April 1994. However, being rich in oil resources, Kazakhstan was not enthusiastic about receiving Japanese economic assistance, which for Japan is one of its limited means to promote bilateral relations. There were some problems in Kazakh–Japan relations of the middle 1990s and for many Japanese, Kazakh officials seemed intractable, leading to preference for the Uzbeks who always received the Japanese very cordially (Kawato, 2008, pp.16–17).

In 1994, Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov made his first visit to Japan, and by 1997, Japan was to give about US\$500 million in soft loans and grants to Uzbekistan, making the latter a showcase of Japan’s assistance in Central Asia.

In 1997 it was initiated “Eurasian” or “Silk Road” Diplomacy concept for Japan policy toward Central Asia, which had a three-layered structure: political dialog, economic cooperation and cooperation in nuclear non-proliferation, democratization and maintaining stability. Silk Road” Diplomacy also gave the Japanese government a chance to develop its systematic support of Central Asia (Yuasa, 2010, pp.121–122).

Japan’s “Silk road Diplomacy” was highly lauded by countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Japan’s ODA yen loans till 2010 to Central Asia are about US\$2 billion so far; grant aid is rather small, totaling US\$600 million up to now. Within that sum, about US\$260 million is for technical assistance toward capacity building.<sup>1</sup> ODA’s loans were used for infrastructure development in Central Asia: roads, modernization of airports, railways, optical fiber lines, bridges, power plants, vocational schools, water supply and canalization system.<sup>2</sup>

ODA was used to technological innovation and constrictions and Central Asian nations defined priorities themselves.

In January–February 2010, the author performed qualitative sociological survey among 20 scholars from academia and experts from government (including, institutes of strategic studies) and nongovernmental organizations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan on the Central Asia–Japan bilateral and multilateral relations.

<sup>1</sup> Data available from Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, <http://www.mofa.go.jp> (April 10, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Information from the JICA office in Tokyo during interview of author in March 2010.

Although systematic research on Central Asia–Japan relations is lacking, the survey offers interesting trends for the Central Asian researchers and officials. According to the results Japan has a moderate position in Central Asia. To the position of Japan in the foreign policy of their countries the answer of respondents from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were equally divided in two equal groups between “important” and “insignificant”. But all of the respondents from Uzbekistan are considered it as “important”. The main directions of the bilateral partnership with Japan, for Kazakhstan are trade and energy, transport, education and cultural relations, for other countries education, trade, transport and a humanitarian partnership.

In August 28, 2004, Japan Foreign Minister Kawaguchi held a joint meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan, with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of all the Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan. The ensuing Joint Statement declared that Japan and the four Central Asian countries had agreed to launch the new forum, “Central Asia Plus Japan”.

In August 2006 was made the first visit by Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi to the Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is part of Japan’s efforts to shape its foreign policy toward this resource-rich and strategically important region. During Koizumi’s visit to Kazakhstan, where the memorandum on cooperation in peaceful exploitation of nuclear energy and uranium mine development was signed. In Uzbekistan, in addition to energy-related talks and the commitment of both sides to launch a framework for working-level talks on various issues, including Japan’s aid for education projects involving increased number of students from Uzbekistan attending Japanese educational institutions.

It should be noted that oil and gas are not the only resources that whet Japan’s interest in Central Asia, but also uranium. Japan is the world’s third-largest nuclear-power nation in terms of the number of civilian nuclear plants in operation.

In autumn 2006, Aso Taro, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan in the new Cabinet under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, launched a new initiative “The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity”.<sup>3</sup> In the same year, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) set out to create the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity (AFP) as a new pillar for Japanese diplomacy. The AFP was represented an initiative for foreign policy based on democracy, among the entire area along the rim of the Eurasian continent, including ASEAN countries, Central and South Asia, the Middle East, the Black Sea region, and Central and East Europe.

During almost two decades due to the Japan government and organizations support thousands of young students from Central Asia had graduated and participated in different educational and trainings programmer at the universities and organizations in Japan. Taking into account

that the majority of Central Asian population is young it is a valuable contribution to the good education of new generation.

Central Asian nations and Japan within a short time period established bilateral relations, but the relations differ by the countries. Japan made considerable support in the framework of ODA and gradually developing multilateral relations. There are different levels and directions of Japan relations with Central Asian republics.

The results of author’s survey have shown that among all of the Central Asian experts responded on Japan’s ODA program and its most affective issues for their countries all mentioned educations files, including exchanges of students, technical assistance to the high schools, the quality of training. Economic and cultural relations were also mentioned several times. Among effective grants programs was pointed out free study Japanese, also students possibility study and get new knowledge on the social, economic, technological developments in Japan, improving of local government’s workers skills and get to know Japan experiences in the economic management.

To the question “Which fields should be priority for partnership of your country with Japan?” In answers, there were mainly were mentioned political and economic cooperation, investment, trade, agriculture, informational technology, energy, and educational in the partnership. In addition, the relations on level of Political parties and NGOs (Kyrgyzstan). Academic and analytical partnership between research centers (Uzbekistan).

It should be noted, that Japan’s universities and research centers, including the famous Center of Slavic Research of Hokkaido University, University of Tokyo, University of Tsukuba, Japan Institute for International Affairs are very active in the research and study of history, culture, politics and international relations of Central Asia.

One of the most significant problems in central Asia–Japan relation is lack of information about each other. For instance, according to Japanese Prof. Uyama the general public and political circles in Japan, do not always recognize the importance of Central Asia, and diplomats and experts who work with this region have often had difficulties in explaining why Central Asia matters (Uyama, 2009, p.101). Also a Kazakh scholar mentioning, that ordinary citizens of Kazakhstan do not know much about the modern Japan, its culture, moral system and far less about its current foreign policy priorities and modern diplomacy. The similar situation is in Japan, where ordinary Japanese people almost know nothing about Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian countries. Existing vacuum of information creates mutual misunderstanding and negatively effects development of bilateral cooperation between Central Asian states and Japan and moreover, Japanese multilateral cooperation initiatives in the region (Nurgaliyev, 2008, p.31).

In Central Asia there is also different understanding and approaches toward Japan. In my pool experts also mentioned some problems in Central Asia–Japan relations. Though the majority (80%) consider started the absence of the problem in the relations of their country and Japan, but 20% of the respondents mentioned some problems, including language issues, low level political cooperation compared with economic relations, moderate level of

<sup>3</sup> More detail on the Initiative “The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” see, Yuasa Takeshi. Consolidating “Value-Oriented Diplomacy” toward Eurasia? The “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and Beyond. In C. Len, T. Uyama and T. Hirose (eds), *Japan’s Silk Road Diplomacy. Paving the Road Ahead*, Silk Road Monograph, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, Washington, D.C., 2008 P.28.

economic cooperation, weak contacts and experts, lack of experiences of Japan business in Central Asia.

But situation has gradually changed, for instance in the different cities of Japan JICA's volunteers are holding different presentations on their work in Asian and African countries. The author had a chance to observe such presentation on JICA in Sapporo in April 2010 on their activities in Central Asia and to talk with the volunteers who worked in Central Asian countries.

It should be noted that after terrible earthquake in Japan in March 2011 all Central Asian countries expressed their support and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan provided humanitarian assistance to the country.

### 3. Dynamics of bilateral relation

#### 3.1. Kazakhstan–Japan

As it was mentioned above Kazakh–Japan relations in the beginning of the 1990s were not smooth and were faced with some difficulties.<sup>4</sup> In 1994 and 1999 President Nursultan Nazarbayev passed to visits to Tokyo and “Joint declaration on friendship, partnership and cooperation” was signed, as well as a number of other documents in economic and cultural spheres. During the visit of Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan Amari on April 30, 2007 to Astana and Prime Minister Massimov a Joint Statement on strengthening of strategic partnership in peaceful use of atomic energy was signed. Besides, Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Izmukhambetov and Director-general of the Natural Resources and Energy Agency of Japan Mochizuki became the signatories of the memo on cooperation in training specialists for installation of light-water resources. Parties also signed the number of agreements to increase Kazakh uranium exports to Japan, as well as to start co-operation in the sphere of reactor technologies, production of nuclear fuel and natural uranium.

During the visit of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi to Kazakhstan on August 2007 with the Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev was signed a joint statement on further development of friendship, partnership and collaboration between Kazakhstan and Japan. Moreover the President of Kazakhstan and the Prime Minister of Japan adopted memorandum on promoting collaboration in the sphere of peaceful use of atomic energy.

Bilateral economic collaboration between Kazakhstan and Japan includes the area of industrial technologies and atomic energy (exporting natural uranium, nuclear fuel production, technology exchange in the fields of reactor building, and personnel training). The Japanese business is engaged in transportation, energy, manufacturing, trade, service and mining. The volume of bilateral trade in 2006 reached about \$584 mill.<sup>5</sup>

Japan's assistance in overcoming of consequences of nuclear tests in the Semipalatinsk region as well as the preservation of Aral Sea and elimination of consequences of the ecological catastrophe which has a great importance for the countries of Central Asia.

From 1993 overall Japanese credits to Kazakhstan made up 188.8 billion of yens, including such projects as: “Railway Transport Capacity Development Project” – 17236 bill (1995); “Yrtish River bridge Construction Projects” – 121,530 bill (1996); “Astana airport Reconstruction Project” – 122,122 bill (1998); “Western Kazakhstan Road Network Rehabilitation Project” – 16, 539 bill (2000); “Astana Water Supply and Sewerage Project” – 1, 361 bill (2002).<sup>6</sup>

In addition Japan companies are participating in different international energy consortiums, including in the company “Inpex”, (international oil company with 50% of shares of the Japan National Oil company) in the Caspian Sea.<sup>7</sup>

In November 2008 Kazakh President Nazarbayev made his third visit to Tokyo and met with Prime Minister of Japan Fukuda. Memorandum to the project of convention between the Republic of Kazakhstan and Japan on preventing double taxation and preventing taxation avoidance in relation to income taxes and Memorandum on mutual cooperation in the area of developing trade and investments were signed within the visit.

In March 2010, Secretary of State–Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan Saudabayev visited Tokyo and met Prime Minister Hatoyama, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Naoshima. Energy partnership is the backbone of economic relations between the two countries, with nuclear energy playing an increasingly important role. Kazakhstan's national atomic company Kazatomprom and one of Japan's largest firms, Sumitomo Corporation signed an agreement establishing a joint enterprise “Summit Atom Rare Earth Company” (SARECO). The project stipulates construction of a mining and enrichment complex dealing with extraction and processing of rare-earth metals, mainly from used mineral deposits in East Kazakhstan.

Also the Japanese side financing the construction of a highway in South Kazakhstan, which would serve as part of an international transport corridor being developed by the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation framework. The two parties implemented intergovernmental agreements on avoiding double taxation.

Despite some difficulties and problems in the 1990s the Kazakh–Japan relations had a positive transformation shift toward extending relations in the different fields, including energy, transport–communication and economic partnership.

#### 3.2. Kyrgyzstan–Japan

Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian country that attracted great attention of Japan, but later on bilateral relations was moderate and even the Japan embassy in

<sup>4</sup> For more Kazakh–Japan relations in the 1990th see, Uyama T. Uyama, “Japanese Policies in Relation to Kazakhstan: Is There a ‘Strategy’?”, in R. Legvold, *Thinking strategically: the Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003, pp. 165–186.

<sup>5</sup> Kazakhstan Embassy in Japan. <http://www.embkazjp.org/kazakhstan-japan.htm> 10 April 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Information was provided by JICA office in Tokyo in April 2010. Central Asia and ODA Loans. Japan Bank for International cooperation. 2008. Pp.4–5.

<sup>7</sup> From the website Japan embassy in Kazakhstan. 6 April 2010.

Bishkek was opened in 2003 after Japan embassies had been already opened in Tashkent, Almaty and Dushanbe. The Kyrgyz embassy in Tokyo was opened in 2004. Nevertheless among donor countries Japan occupies a leading role in Kyrgyzstan and main assistance areas include: (1) enhancement of transport infrastructure; (2) agricultural development; (3) social development; (4) human resource development in an open market environment; and (5) greater access to basic human needs, including human security (Marat, 2008, pp.87–100). From 1992 to 2005 Kyrgyzstan, through these channels was benefited assistance with more than 389 USD mill in the form of credits and grants.<sup>8</sup> The chief impact of Japan's input into Kyrgyzstan's economy can be felt through its infrastructure projects such as Bishkek-Manas International Airport Modernization Project (r5454 bill), including runway, control center and passenger terminal; Bishkek-Osh Road Rehabilitation Project (total r8266 bill), rehabilitation of the heavily deteriorated sectors of the Bishkek-Osh road, and procurement of equipment for safe and efficient operation and maintenance, improving the efficiency and safety of the country's principal road transport link.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, Tokyo is actively developing projects to improve the payment system, establishment of the banking settlement system in real time (r3.44 billion), the development of the master development plan for broadcasting, research fields of mineral resources in the Talas region, as well as developing a master plan for industrial development of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The main export components from Japan to Kyrgyzstan are cars, varicose kind of equipments for different fields of industry, electronics and export from Kyrgyzstan to Japan mainly precious metal and chemicals.<sup>10</sup>

A number of Japanese special funds are involved in providing assistance to Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia through the World Bank and Asian Development Bank. Bilateral assistance is carried out by Japan's International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Japan Bank for International Cooperation. JICA has been actively training Kyrgyz entrepreneurs in business development and tourism promotion.

In the framework of technical cooperation and with the purpose of human development in the period of market economy in Kyrgyzstan there created the Center of Development of human recourses in the Kyrgyz National University. The center provides Japanese class, training and organizing seminars.<sup>11</sup>

Japanese volunteers active in areas such as regional development, human resources for the transition to a market economy, strengthening the capacity of people with disabilities. Also, volunteers, experts contribute to the development of economy and agriculture, particularly in remote mountainous regions. From 2000 until the present

time in the country worked 141 volunteer. Currently working in Kyrgyzstan from 43 volunteers working 15 in the capital, and the rest – in Chui, Naryn and Issyk-Kul regions.<sup>12</sup>

In February 2013 Almazbek Atambaev, President of the Kyrgyz Republic made a visit to Japan. During the stay President Atambaev meet the Emperor of Japan. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe also hold a meeting with President Atambaev to exchange opinions on bilateral relations between Japan and the Kyrgyz Republic, international issues, and other topics. During the visit it was signed documents on cooperation between the two countries, in particularly: Memorandum of Cooperation between the Ministry of Economic Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry of Japan; Memorandum on cooperation in the field of education between the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan and others. According experts the visit of President Atambaev contributed further strengthen the bilateral relations between Japan and the Kyrgyz Republic.<sup>13</sup>

There are some obstacles and problems in the Kyrgyz–Japan relations in different aspects of bilateral relations, including future professional perspectives of the young students in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>14</sup> Among the complex factors which will effect on further Kyrgyz–Japan relations as well as relation with other countries depend also on stability of the domestic political and economic situation in Kyrgyzstan.

### 3.3. Tajikistan–Japan

In December 1991 Japan has recognized independence of Tajikistan and diplomatic relations between these two countries were established in January 1992. Due to the Civil war and instability in Tajikistan relationship between the two parties in 1990s was very limited. Only in October 1999 Kyko Nakayama was appointed as a first Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Ambassador of Japan to Tajikistan with residence in Tashkent. In 2002 Japan embassy was opened in Dushanbe and in November 2007 the Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan to Japan was opened in Tokyo. In August 2006 the JICA also opened its office in Tajikistan.

Since 2001 Tajik President Rakhmon had paid three times visits to Tokyo in 2001, 2003 and 2007 respectively. Also other senior Tajik leaders made visits to Japan including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chairman of the House of Representatives of Tajikistan, and also Mr. Nuri, Former President of the Islamic Rebirth Party in 2001. Among senior visits of Japan it could be mentioned Member of the House of Representatives, Special Envoy for Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. Tajikistan was also

<sup>8</sup> Information from the website of Japan embassy in Bishkek. [http://www.kg.emb-japan.go.jp/relation\\_r.htm](http://www.kg.emb-japan.go.jp/relation_r.htm) 8 April 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Central Asia and ODA Loans. Japan Bank for International cooperation. 2008. Pp.5.

<sup>10</sup> Information from the website of Japan embassy in Bishkek. [http://www.kg.emb-japan.go.jp/relation\\_r.htm](http://www.kg.emb-japan.go.jp/relation_r.htm). April 6 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Author short visited to the Center in March 2009.

<sup>12</sup> URL: <http://www.vb.kg/218344>.

<sup>13</sup> URL: <http://www.vb.kg/218344>.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on Kyrgyz–Japan relations see, Marat (2008) Kyrgyzstan: Japan's Prime Partner in Central Asia? In C. Len, T. Uyama and T. Hirose (eds), *Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy. Paving the Road Ahead*, Silk Road Monograph, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, Washington, D.C. Pp.87–100.

visited by Japan's Parliament's delegations, including in 2000 visits of Member of the House of Councilors, former State Secretary for Foreign Affairs (as a Head of the Monitoring Mission for Parliamentary Election) and Member of the House of Representatives Member of the House of Councilors. There were also visits from the different ministerial levels delegations, including the visit of Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan in 2004.

Trade relation between countries is very moderate, for instance in 2007 export from Tajikistan to Japan was €0.6 million (rubber products, etc.) and Import from Japan: €180 million (cars, construction machines). Japan's Official Development Assistance: Grant: €8.634 billion (the total till FY 2007) and Technical Cooperation: €2.927 billion (the total till FY 2007). Cultural Grant (cumulative total fiscal 1975–2007): €187.2 million (Cultural Grant Aid) and €50.2 million (Grassroots Grant Aid).<sup>15</sup>

Assistance to developing infrastructure in Tajikistan has been carried out in the form of grant aid, not yen loans, in consideration of the tragic results of the civil war. Since 2000 Tajik–Japan relations have intensified and Japan's economic assistance to the economy and social sector of the country is increasing. In particularly Project for the Rehabilitation of Kurgan Tyube-Dusti Road is aimed to improve a section of the Kurgan Tyube-Dusti road, which Japan has been helping upgrade.<sup>16</sup> In the future, this road will pass through the Afghanistan capital of Kabul to Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, giving Tajikistan access to the Indian Ocean. This cooperation will facilitate the distribution of goods throughout the region and is expected to contribute to the economic development of Tajikistan.

### 3.4. Turkmenistan–Japan

Although diplomatic relations were established in April 1992, but the Embassy of Japan was opened in Ashgabat only in January 2005. During Turkmen President Niyazov, official visit from Turkmenistan to Japan were on the ministerial level and he himself never visited to Tokyo. ODA to Turkmenistan has been since the former President Saparmurat Niyazov was reluctant to receive foreign assistance.<sup>17</sup>

Japan–Turkmen relations had little improvement during new President Berdimuhamedov, who had visited to Tokyo in December 2009. In January 2010 Nurberdiyeva, Chairperson of the Parliament (Mejlis) also made a visit to Japan.

In 2007 the first ODA's Railway Transportation Modernization Project (€4505 mill) was initiated and the first project supports rehabilitation of the Ashgabat locomotive repair workshop and introduction of the computer system.<sup>18</sup>

In 2008 mutual trade dynamics was very moderate and exports to Japan: €215 million (Art works and antiques) and imports from Japan: €7.7 billion (Construction machines, steel pipes and tubes). Japan's Official Development Assistance: Loans: €4500 million (the total till FY 2007) and Grants: €620 million yen (the total till FY 2007) Technical Cooperation: €481 million (the total till FY 2007). Cultural Grant (cumulative total fiscal 1975–2008): €65.6 million (Cultural Grant Aid).

Japan–Turkmen relations have much increased with new leadership of Turkmenistan, which that try developing more active international relations with foreign countries, international and regional organizations.

### 3.5. Uzbekistan–Japan

Japan considers Uzbekistan like Kazakhstan as main important country in Central Asia and has manifested the desire to develop cooperation with Uzbekistan in the wider sphere of bilateral relations. Talking on Uzbek–Japan relations President Karimov stressed that Japan was one of the oldest and most reliable investment partners of our nation.<sup>19</sup>

Uzbekistan attaches particular importance to the further development of cooperation with Japan, the largest economy in Asia, an influential member of the international community, can play a significant role in solving major regional and international issues (Khoshimov, 2008, p.26).

During the first visit of the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov to Japan in May 1994, was signed several documents and held the first meeting of Uzbek–Japanese and Japanese–Uzbek Committees on Economic Cooperation, on the basis of agreement from May 1994 to hold annual joint meetings of the committees. In the same year was established Parliamentary Friendship League “Japan–Uzbekistan” in Tokyo. Uzbekistan regularly is visited by the mission of representatives of major Japanese business and government officials. Since 1999, there was an exchange of visits by foreign ministers.

During President Karimov visit to Japan in July 2002 it was signed fourteen documents aimed at enhancing political and cultural exchanges and strengthening economic ties through increased Japanese investment in the private sector and also a joint declaration on friendship, strategic partnership and cooperation between the Republic of Uzbekistan and Japan.

Accordingly Kawato President Karimov also promoted the idea of constructing a new railway to reduce dependence on Russia and Turkmenistan, opening a new transportation route: a route to the Persian Gulf via Afghanistan (Kawato, 2008, p.16).

The Japanese company was interested in the development of resources in large oil and gas bearing areas Ustyurt, Bukhara, Khiva, South–West Gisar, Surkhandarya and Fergana regions. In May 1995, a contract was signed to construct a refinery in Bukhara between national company

<sup>15</sup> See the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan web site: [www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/data/gaiyou/odaproject/europe/index.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/oda/data/gaiyou/odaproject/europe/index.html). (April 5, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> Japan's ODA White Paper 2012. [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2012/pdfs/030203\\_3.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2012/pdfs/030203_3.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Japan's ODA White Paper 2012. [http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2012/pdfs/030203\\_3.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/oda/white/2012/pdfs/030203_3.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> Central Asia and ODA Loans. Japan Bank for International cooperation. 2008. p.5.

<sup>19</sup> President meets Japanese Deputy Prime Minister. <http://uza.uz/en/business/1285/>. (7 May 2010).

“Uzbekneftegaz”, the company “Marubeni” and the French company “Technip” worth \$262 mill.

Japanese ODA for major investment and social programs in Uzbekistan. During almost two decades soft and commercial loans totaling more than US \$2 billion were obtained and these funds were directed to projects for the development of telecommunication networks, reconstruction train-car repairing plant in Tashkent, upgrading of airports in Samarkand, Bukhara, Urgench and also the railway project Tashguzar-Baysun-Kumkurgan.<sup>20</sup>

In Uzbekistan has a huge role also played by the International Caravan-Sarai of Culture Ikuo Hirayama as a center of cultural and scientific exchange between Japan and Uzbekistan.

In August 2008 Japan and Uzbekistan signed a mutual investment agreement<sup>21</sup> and the agreement came into force in September 2009.

For example, a corporation “Mitsubishi” is involved in the modernization of some of the chemical industry enterprises of the country, the experts of “Uzavtoprom” together with representatives of the Japanese group “Itochu” establishing the production of new car brands at the “SamAvto”, Corporation “Mitsui” is active in the implementation of the industrial free economic zone and multimodal logistics center “Navoi”, as well as joint projects carried out in the field of high technology with “Sumitomo”.

Uzbekistan supported the ADB in implementation of the project on construction of the railway Khairaton-Mazari-Sharif, and considers it necessary to further develop the railway infrastructure in Afghanistan. This will permit to implement the project of construction of the Trans-Afghan corridor and open the shortest route for a railway transit of cargoes from Central Asia to the nearest ports of the Indian Ocean and will promote economic development of Afghanistan.

In May 2010 during the 43rd Annual Meeting of the ADB Board of Governors in Tashkent between the government of Uzbekistan, the Asian Development Bank and the Japan International Cooperation Agency signed a seven documents are worth a total of \$1.015 billion and that for see financing projects in important sectors of Uzbekistan.<sup>22</sup> Among these projects are reconstructions of water supply system in Ferghana Valley cities, development of regional roads, support and micro financing small business, participation of Uzbek banks in trade financing program, as well as construction of two combined cycle gas turbines at Talimarjan thermal power station.

At the same time, there are some problems in development of economic relations between Uzbekistan and Japan. According to Japanese companies, they include frequent changed laws and regulations, lack of transparency in getting licenses, corruption, problematic convertibility of currency, the problems with logistics and transportation, instable taxes procedure and others.

There are some problems in using agricultural equipments and imperfection of the educational system in Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan.<sup>23</sup> But Uzbek side partly is willing to more active participation of Japan in Central Asian affairs and also enlarging Uzbek–Japan relations.

In 2001 Uzbekistan–Japan Human Development Center was established in Tashkent and the initiative of the organization and the founders of the center were the Japanese International Cooperation Agency and the Ministry for Foreign Economic Relations of Uzbekistan. The main objective was to organize special trainings programs based on the Japanese experience and extended, special economic training of Uzbek specialists in Japan.<sup>24</sup>

The Japanese side supports the National Program for training, soft loans for the project equipping of professional colleges. JICA organizes internships for Uzbek specialists in Japan and attract Japanese experts to work on investment and other projects. In addition there is the exchange of students, academics and specialists are taking place every academic year.

Since 1999 the Japanese government carry out the project “Provision of scholarships for training” with the aim of training qualified personnel, which in the future as public servants and professionals will be directly involved in the development strategy of the state in areas such as economics, finance and the legal system. During the entire period of the project at the Japanese university graduate courses trained around 250 students from Uzbekistan.

The dynamics of the Uzbek–Japanese relations over recent years shows positive transformation of bilateral partnership and multilateral dialog. But it is important to solve mutual problems and increased cooperation between Japan and Uzbekistan in all aspects.

#### 4. Multilateral approach: Central Asia plus Japan

The geopolitical situation in the Central Asia changed considerably in the second part of the 1990s and at the beginning of the millennium, when China start began activating bilateral and multilateral relations in Central Asia with starting Shanghai process in 1996, Russia reestablished its position and sphere of interest in Central Asia. Since 2001 the new geostrategic transformation came to Central Asia with the appearing its military bases in Central Asia countries. NATO contingent in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan and starting counterterrorism operation in Afghanistan. Also it was grooving of Central Asian importance as the natural resource of the region, significant geo-economic potential and verification of energy delivery to the world market.

Also in the beginning of 21st century we see activation of India, Korea and Japan in Central Asia, which were

<sup>20</sup> Information was provided by JICA office in Tokyo in April 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Diplomatic Bluebook 2009 (Summary) p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Uzbekistan national news agency. <http://uza.uz/en/business/1285/>. (4 May 2010).

<sup>23</sup> For more details of agriculture and education see Timur Dadabaev. Models of Cooperation in Central Asia and Japan's Central Asian Engagements: Factors, Determinants and Trends. In K.Len, T. Uyama and T. Hirose (eds), *Japan's Silk Road Diplomacy. Paving the Road Ahead*, Silk Road Monograph, The Central Asia and Caucasus Institute, 121–140.

<sup>24</sup> Visit of author to the Center in February 2010; JICA in Uzbekistan 10 years development assistance. 2009. JICA Uzbekistan office.

mainly welcomed in the region. Japan attempted to implement not only active bilateral partnership, but also multilateral one. Tokyo recognized the growing strategic importance of Central Asia in the context of international security and sought to play a more active role in Eurasia.

In 2002 in Asian Forum in Boao of China, Prime Minister of Japan presented a speech for Central Asia as the continent's geo-strategic hub in the integration of the region in economic cooperation with countries in East Asia. It was a call to join the transcontinental efforts to attract capital and technology to create and enhance the effectiveness of infrastructure in the region, including construction of oil and gas pipelines from the region in the East and South-East Asia.

As continuation of this new approach in August 2004 Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi visited the four countries of Central Asia—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and held talks with presidents on the issues of bilateral relations, regional cooperation and situation in Afghanistan. As a result in August 28, 2004 the first foreign ministerial conference of “Central Asia plus Japan” was held in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. In the conclusion of the conference, foreign ministers signed a joint declaration in which pointed out that all the participants expressed the hope that they will continue the dialog and develop the cooperative relations in all spheres between Japan and the Central Asian countries. Yoriko Kawaguchi's visit to the Central Asia is aimed at consolidating and strengthening the bilateral and multilateral relations between Japan and the Central Asian countries.

The main concepts of inter-regional cooperation “Central Asia plus Japan” were declared respect different points of view, competition and coordination and open cooperation.

In October 2006 the Foreign Ministers of Japan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, the special envoy from Kazakhstan and also the Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan as a guest held the Second Foreign Ministers Meeting within the framework of the “Central Asia plus Japan” Dialog in Tokyo and discussed how the countries could cooperate among themselves, focusing on the promotion of intra-regional cooperation.

In the meeting it was endorsed “policy dialog,” “intra-regional cooperation,” “business promotion,” “intellectual dialog,” and “cultural and people-to-people exchange” as the pillars of cooperation within the framework. Also during the 2nd Foreign Ministers' meeting the “Action Plan” was accepted, which describes in concrete terms the types and contents of contribution Japan intends or plans to make. The major instrument for implementing the Action Plan is Japan's ODA programs, mainly technical cooperation and grant financial assistance and concessional loans.

However, the further development of Central Asia plus Japan was very slow and not concrete, example it was planned for the Japan Minister of Foreign Affairs Aso and his counterparts from Central Asia to meet while they attended the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2007, but, it did not happen. According to information from Central Asian embassies, there was also a plan to hold the third ministerial meeting in Tashkent in 2008, but due to

some problems from Japan side, including often replacement Prime Minister Administration the Tashkent meeting would not be organized.<sup>25</sup> Only in August 2010 it was organized third ministerial meeting in Tashkent (Uzbekistan).

According to my survey in 2010 among the majority of Central Asian experts (80%) consider the format “Central Asia plus Japan” as “having little effect”, but the initiative could support future regional cooperation, due to the absence of geopolitical interest of Japan in Central Asia, its historical transformation and presumably its economic activation. At the same time 20% of respondents consider initiative “insignificant and having negative effect on the future cooperation”.<sup>26</sup>

In November 2012 in Tokyo, the regular meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Central Asian countries and Japan took place, which was commemorating to 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. At the meeting for the first time participated Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan.

At the sixth meeting of the executive-level dialog were discussed priorities for the development of regional cooperation in partnership with Japan, in particular, trade and investment, regional security, the fight against extremism and drug trafficking, transport and communication, energy, health and protection of the environment, as well as issues of joint involvement of economic potential of the region and Japan to the process of reconstruction of Afghanistan. During the meeting, Japanese Foreign Minister Gamba promised to carry out projects worth \$700 million, which should facilitate regional cooperation around Afghanistan and to promote international trade and investment in the region.<sup>27</sup>

At the meeting also decided in the “Central Asia plus Japan” will be opened new aspects to the dialog as a meeting of experts and exchanges between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. So the next Forum “Dialog of intellectuals” was held in the spring of 2013 in Tokyo.

The Central Asian nations consider cooperation with Japan to be strategically important and collaboration also will also build closer trade, economic and investment interaction between Eurasia, Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific region, using geo-strategic and other advantage.

During many years Japan shows interest in the «political stability and development of all forms of cooperation» with the countries of Central Asia, the desire to strengthen and consolidate its presence in the region to ensure greater stability in the supply of energy for its economy. At present Japan imports some 90% of its crude oil from Middle East and it is essential energy security of Japan.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Author meeting the officials in March 2010.

<sup>26</sup> Sociological survey among 20 experts from Central Asia-Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. In February 2010.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/dialogue/index.html> (August 20, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Diplomatic Bluebook 2009 (Summary) P.8.



According to Japanese scholar Yuasa there is also a link between Russia and Central Asia in the context of the Japanese strategy of energy supply from Eurasia. The idea of diversifying the supply route was driven by Japan's pragmatic policy toward Russia, especially since the beginning of the 21st century (Yuasa, 2010, p. 128). Also Japan and Russia have shared mutual interests in Central Asia regarding energy issues, and especially regarding the construction of a cooperative regime of technology for the peaceful use of nuclear energy.

The Japanese also consider that the development of the transcontinental transport system will intensify the integration of Central Asia in global trade, as well as provide access to the development of commodity resources in the region. Japan like many other countries is very interested and supported in the speedy release of Central Asia on any of the possible routes through China, Turkey, either through Iran or Afghanistan and Pakistan. The future transport communications projects will serve to foster economic relations between Central Asia and Japan itself.

According to MOF of Japan continues to support efforts of the Central Asian and Caucasian countries toward democratization and transition to the market economy, through bilateral means as well as through the framework of the "Central Asia plus Japan" Dialog and others.<sup>29</sup>

The success of Japan's and Central Asian multilateral partnership depends on a range of other factors. According to Prof. Dadabaev it is important to promote functionalist models of inter-state relations within the Central Asia Plus Japan initiative, which would require a clear definition of goals, and consistently pursuing cooperation beginning with a limited number of sectors and areas (Dadabaev, 2008, p.140).

In my serve among Central Asia experts to the question "What aspects of Japan development experiences will be useful for your country?" The experts gave the following replies:

*Kazakhstan:* professional qualities and availability, high technologies, economic development with high contribution to the sciences and education, work culture.

*Kyrgyzstan:* state regulation experiences, economic experiences, experiences of economic development with absence natural recourses.

*Tajikistan:* technological and economic development, need to more better inform people in Central Asia with difficult problems and challenges and their solutions which were settled in the history of Japan, more Japanese centers and cultural representatives in the regions of the country, students and specialist exchanges programs, modernization of traditional thinking.

*Uzbekistan:* experience of creating modern diversified and developed economy, achievement of high level of people's income with lower level of corruption. At the same time preserving and leaving with national traditions and mentality, experience of correlations and coexisting of past (material and spiritual traditions) and modernity (technology).

Sum, Central Asia Plus Japan initiative is a good platform for multinational partnership, but it is necessary to define the particularly goals and measures, gradually widening it the scale and scope of cooperation with participation off all interested nations, international and regional organizations.

## 5. Central Asia–Japan in the context of wider international cooperation

In the post-Cold War period Japan expanded its foreign and security policies to include the Asia-Pacific and Eurasia. Japan had considerable transformation in relations with China, Korea, India and different multilateral formats.

Different international regional cooperation projects, including ASEAN are very useful for Central Asia also. There are different regional organizations in Eurasia – CIS, CSTO, Eurasian Economic Community, SCO. According to author's sociological survey and interviewing the experts from Central Asia consider the SCO as the most successful organization in Central Asia (Rakhimov, 2013, p.72). There are different opinions on the perspective of Japan and Central Asia relations in the context of different organizations, including the SCO. For the Central Asian states, pointed out Nurgaliev participation of Japan in the SCO is very beneficial as well. Regarding the long-term interests of small members of the organization (Central Asia countries) participation of Japan to the SCO is enlargement of space for economic and political balancing in fact. Thus, it is necessary to emphasize that on the modern stage Japan has enough opportunities to involve more actively in the region of the Central Asia and for starting cooperation with the SCO as well (Nurgaliyev, 2008, p.33). Japanese scholar Iwashita proposed in the framework of SCO to create ad hoc status at the summit, perhaps with a "Guest" status; Pre-summit interactions: for example, Establishing a "SCO Plus Alpha" format; from a "Guest" toward a "Partner." The framework could be laid out in the form of the SCO Plus Three (EU, U.S., Japan), the SCO Regional Forum and so on; Linking the SCO and other regional organizations such as SAARC, ASEAN, the Six-Party talks (Iwashita, 2008, pp.73–74).

During the SCO summit in Tashkent in June, 2010 several agreements were signed, including "Regulation on accepting new member countries of SCO". According to the document, a country candidate to the membership should be from Eurasian region, have diplomatic relations with all member countries, to have an observer status or a partner on dialog status, not to be under the UN sanctions, not to be in the military conflict with any other country or countries. But future development and transparence it is necessary for the SCO to develop strong partnership with Japan, Korea and other Asian and European countries.

It is well known that Central Asian nations continuously and consistently express their support for Japan's seat for permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UN SC). It is interesting that in our survey the majority experts (80%) by started different assessing, including the Japan's economic potential, contribution to different countries, foreign policy strategy and others, supporting the Japan's permanent seats in the UN SC, at the same time, at least one

<sup>29</sup> Diplomatic Bluebook 2009 (Summary) P.8.

respondent from each country expressed the opinion denying to supporting the permanent seat, due on the reason that “it will increase the number of countries who want to get permanent seats”, or “Japan has no position as global play to contribute to the international security”.

Since the beginning of international counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan, Japan is one of the main donors to reconstruction in Afghanistan, where Japan is conducting replenishment support activities in the Indian Ocean through the Maritime Self- Defense Force. In addition Japan is contributing considerable assistance in to the areas of infrastructure development and health and education through ODA. As for Afghanistan’s neighbor Pakistan, Japan is actively pursuing efforts toward the eradication of terrorism and the stabilization of the economy.<sup>30</sup> From September 2001 to July 2009, Japan has donated US\$1,79 billion for humanitarian aid, democratization, governance, security sector reform, and other reconstruction assistance for Afghanistan (Yuasa, 2010, p.133).

Central Asian countries also participate in the reconstruction process in Afghanistan. Stabilization of Afghanistan is the key factor of security of Central Asia and the future international communication project thought Afghanistan also would foster broad Asian and Central Asia–Japan partnership.

Talking on perspective of the broad partnership in Asian continent, we could mention the concept “Broader East Asia” or “Eastern Eurasia”. Central Asia according to Uyama, occupies an important place in Broader East Asia (Uyama, 2009, pp.117–118).

## 6. Conclusions

Central Asian countries and Japan during almost two decades extended bilateral relations and multilateral partnership. Japan’s ODA program provides considerable technological and infrastructure construction to all Central Asia countries, but with some differentiation. Japan until now had official support for the economic development of the five countries in the amount of \$ 3.5 billion, was invited to Japan to train more than 5000 professionals and 800 students.

There are some challenges and problems of the relations, nevertheless there is a large potential and prospects for improvement and further development. Japan like Korea, India and other countries has a strong positive image in Central Asia, which could be regarded as an additional factor for fostering bilateral and multilateral of East and Central Asia, regional cooperation in Central Asia as well as interregional relation with the vast Asian continent and beyond.

Continuing discussion on the future prospects of the broader bilateral and multilateral partnership, I think it will be good to develop a new concept which can be conventionally entitled “The Concept of Broad Partnership on Silk Road” which will be the basis for intercontinental space of trust, political dialog, mutual understanding and a wider

range of cooperation among European and Asian countries and also other nations from different continents.

Future cooperation between Central Asian nations and Japan, including to its multinational format Central Asia plus Japan other countries, as well as other international and regional organizations should incorporate the following aspects:

Firstly, it is necessary to enlarge academic partnership and joint projects on bilateral bases and in the framework of Central Asia plus Japan;

Secondly, it is necessary to pursue systematic joint research on the dynamics of bilateral and multilateral relations between Central Asia and Japan, political, economic, cultural transformations in region.

Thirdly, the Central Asia and Japan and other partners should continue their partnership on alternative transport corridors and pipelines as well as their cooperation in solving a wide range of problems, including ecological ones;

Fourth, it is necessary to define particularly actions and extend the activities of Central Asia Plus Japan with participation of all interested partners;

And finally, international and regional organizations need to have strong relations and join projects on Central Asia with CIS, SCO, Eurasian Economic Community, Central Asia–Korea format and other regional organizations. A future strong partnership could contribute for sustainable development and strengthening stability in Central Asia as well as will contribute to international stability.

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