



Japan And Processes Of Regionalization In Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the relations between the Central Asian states and Japan at the present stage. The evolution of Japan's diplomatic approaches to this subregion of international relations, as well as its position on the processes of regional integration, is cited. Particular attention is paid to the consonance of the policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan to strengthen the atmosphere of good neighbourliness in Central Asia and Tokyo's position towards the region.

KEYWORDS

Regional cooperation, foreign policy concept, sovereignty, Central Asian integration, centres of influence, subregion, history of cooperation, a subsystem of international relations, collective relationships, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Since the first days of independence by Central Asian countries, Japan has pursued policies aimed at supporting and strengthening its sovereignty. Moreover, it adheres to a coherent foreign policy line aimed at creating a full national statehood in the region and ensuring sustainable economic development.

Japan is also committed to actively promoting the creation of an enabling environment for the dynamic integration of the newly independent states of Central Asia into the international community. This position of Tokyo is explained by the main priority of Japanese foreign policy: the country positions

itself as a global player in the international arena and claims to make a worthy contribution to world development, maintenance of international peace and stability. The above and some other resources are a prerequisite for advancing the idea of Japan being included in the UN Security Council as a possible permanent member, with the expected reform of this major universal international organization [1].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To achieve its foreign policy goals in the region, Central Asia Japan has established full-fledged political, economic and diplomatic relations with all its countries, opening embassies in each of them. It actively exchanges visits at the highest level. The Japanese state, adhering to its age-old national traditions and principles of foreign policy, gradually and consistently increases relations with all the countries of the region in sync. This is done to create a so-called "positive history of cooperation" with them. For CA states, it is guided by the highest international standards of foreign policy, based on openness, transparency, economic efficiency and financial stability.

During the difficult period of the independence of Central Asia in the 1990s, Japan provided substantial financial assistance to Central Asian countries. Its total amount was more than one billion dollars. The United States. At the same time, the share of Uzbekistan was \$396 million, Kazakhstan - \$306 million, Kyrgyzstan - \$290 million, and others. Its assistance to the accession of Central Asian countries as full members of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was also important [2].

A new impetus to relations was given in 1997 when Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto announced a new foreign policy concept: "active Eurasian diplomacy." It included increased cooperation with the

countries of the Silk Road, including the central Asian and Caucasus states [3]. The new foreign policy initiative highlighted three areas of cooperation:

- Strengthening political dialogue to deepen trust and understanding;
- Developing economic cooperation and cooperation in the development of natural resources;
- Strengthening peace in the region through the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, democratization and stabilization.

The adoption of the new concept demonstrated Japan's desire to establish an active independent role in Central Asia. According to experts, Tokyo's wary position on geopolitical changes taking place in the context of the region also contributed to this to some extent. At the same time, it monitored the shifts taking place in the positions of Moscow and Beijing. It is known that after recovering from the negative consequences of the socio-economic crisis, the Russian Federation has once again stepped up its foreign policy attention in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, China's dynamically strengthening economic power began to transform into a growing political and economic influence on neighbouring regions, including Central Asia. In this regard, Japan, positioning itself as an independent centre of international influence, has begun to strengthen ties with the countries of the region in a new format. In 2004, for example, Tokyo proposed, in addition to the bilateral format of relations with the countries of the region, to hold multilateral meetings called "Dialogue Central Asia plus Japan". Thus, Japanese diplomacy has begun to pursue a course to promote the development of intra-regional cooperation in Central Asia, in a model that is now being applied in many parts of the world.

In other words, Tokyo has come to view Central Asia as an emerging regional subsystem of international relations that could potentially become an independent object or subregion of international politics. Characteristically, the then Foreign Minister of Japan J. Kawaguchi was stressed that this policy "Japan does not pursue selfish goals, but focuses on long-term, achievable in the future 10-20 years." Japan's format of cooperation with Central Asian countries was subsequently supported by several other influential partners in the region. These include the United States, the EU, South Korea and India. As a result, the regionalization of Central Asia as a subregion of the international system has come to the attention of members of the international community in planning its foreign policy activities related to the region [4].

The time since the collapse of the former Soviet Union has shown that the transformation of Central Asia into a sustainable regional subsystem of international relations is an alternative option. Its advantages, in addition to ensuring the sustainability of the region's relations with the international community, are evident in several other planes. These are key to improving efforts to strengthen the security of Central Asia and to the sustainable socio-economic development of its countries. The absence of such a subsystem would mean, in the eyes of the international community, the prevailing in the foreign policy of the Central Asian States of short-term priorities rather than a systematic approach to achieving long-term fundamental goals. Given the historical experience of regional subsystems, it can be argued that the consolidation of the Central Asian States' interconnections will not only strengthen their credibility in the international arena but will also protect them from possible negative external factors.

It is known that in the first speech of President of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2017, one of the central points was given to the justification for the development of regional cooperation in Central Asia. It made it clear that the Central Asia region is the top priority of Uzbekistan's foreign policy today. This choice was justified by the fact that Uzbekistan, located in the heart of Central Asia, has a vested interest in making the region a zone of stability, sustainable development and good neighbourliness. It was emphasized that "peaceful, economically prosperous Central Asia is our most important goal and a key task. Uzbekistan is determined to engage in dialogue, constructive cooperation and strengthening good neighbourliness." This position means the readiness of the Uzbek leadership to make reasonable compromises with Central Asian countries on all issues without exception, which has given an activating effect on the formation of specific segments of the subregional system [5].

Admittedly, Japan's diplomatic approaches to the regionalization of Central Asia have proved to be far-sighted. In some cases, they even anticipated the events taking place today. Tokyo's consistent diplomatic efforts have undoubtedly contributed to deepening cooperation in the region, especially political and economic support for regional integration initiatives. The development of infrastructure projects through Japanese financial assistance has become one of the bonding factors of cooperation between the states of the region.

In 2015, there was a significant event in the history of the development of relations between the central Asian and Japanese states: Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's tour of the Central Asian states, endowed with the status of an official visit. It can be said that the very form chosen for official state visits to

the named States eloquently symbolized Japan's vision of their place in the system of modern international relations: they are seen by it as their new subregional system. This is confirmed, in particular, by the fact that Abe's talks with the leaders of the region were imbued with Tokyo's determination to increase political, trade, economic and cultural and humanitarian cooperation with all Central Asian states in sync. It is noteworthy that this political will was supported by the initiative to invest US\$ 25 billion in the Central Asian economy [6].

The Prime Minister's visit was indeed a turning point for the intensification of the business activity of Japanese companies in the region. And the efforts of Japanese diplomacy have helped to create an attractive image of Japan as a reliable and long-term partner of the newly independent states of Central Asia, both in the political and economic spheres.

In light of Tokyo's policy towards Central Asia, the visit of President Sh. Mirziyoyev in December 2019 was of the increased interest of the international expert community. This interest is caused, first of all, by the objective fact that thanks to the initiatives of the head of Uzbekistan, the integration processes in Central Asia have received a powerful impetus: mutual trust is growing, multilateral cooperation is developing, contradictions give way to constructive dialogue and search for mutually beneficial solutions. This explains, in particular, the high assessment of Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kono not only on the reforms being carried out in Uzbekistan but also on the increasing level of cooperation between the countries of the region. During the discussion of issues related to President Sh. Mirziyoyev's visit to Japan, the Minister also emphasized his country's commitment to jointly promoting the open, stable and

independent development of Central Asia [7-18].

CONCLUSION

The first visit of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to Japan was full of various events. Head State visited Nagoya as part of his of an official visit, where he held several meetings including one of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the world - the University of Nagoya, where a solemn event was held dedicated to awarding the President the title of honorary doctor. The main events of the official visit to Japan took place at the Kantei residence in Tokyo. President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe held talks with the participation of official delegations of the two countries. As a result of the summit talks, a Joint Statement on further deepening and expanding the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and Japan, intergovernmental and interagency documents, investment agreements and trade contracts were signed.

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