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## **PUBLIC DIPLOMACY OF JAPAN IN CENTRAL ASIA: THE EXAMPLES OF UZBEKISTAN AND KAZAKHSTAN**

This study focuses on the role of public diplomacy in shaping and implementing Japan's foreign policy in Central Asia. Based on elements of cultural empathy, Japan creates an attractive image in Central Asia through the active use of public diplomacy resources and official development assistance. The central issue is that Japan uses public diplomacy in Central Asia more actively than is officially indicated.

The dynamics of the development of foreign policy relations between Japan and Central Asia (CA) is examined by analyzing the examples of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, focusing on common areas of cooperation and manifestations of public diplomacy in the two countries. Qualitative research methods are used in work, including analysis of the content of documents and interviews. Both in the documents and responses in the interviews, in line with a constructivist approach to international relations, evidence was sought on how Japan identifies and promotes itself with the CA region and the countries concerned, and on the use of public diplomacy as a social power tool respectively.

It was concluded that Japan has several areas of interest in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, including cooperation in the fields of education, economic development in the region, political reforms, and energy resources. Following Japan's new initiative in 2015, the countries of Central Asia and Japan have established diplomatic ties and partnerships that continue to grow. Even though the analyzed documents seem to show that Japan's interest in CA is low, the existence of implemented projects proves the opposite.

**Key words:** Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Japan, public diplomacy.

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## **Орталық Азиядағы Жапонияның жария дипломатиясы: Өзбекстан мен Қазақстан мысалдары**

Бұл зерттеуде Орталық Азиядағы Жапонияның сыртқы саясатын қалыптастыру мен жүзеге асырудағы жария дипломатияның рөліне баса назар аударылады. Мәдени жанашырлық элементтерін негізге ала отырып, Жапония жария дипломатия ресурстарын белсенді пайдалану және даму мақсатындағы ресми көмек (ДРК) арқылы Орталық Азияда тартымды имидж қалыптастырады. Негізгі проблема – Жапония Орталық Азиядағы жария дипломатияны ресми көрсетілгеннен гөрі белсенді қолданатындығында.

Жапония мен Орталық Азия (ОА) арасындағы сыртқы саяси қатынастардың даму серпіні ынтымақтастықтың жалпы бағыттары мен екі елдегі жария дипломатия көріністеріне назар аударып, Қазақстан мен Өзбекстанның мысалдарында зерттеледі. Жұмыста сапалы зерттеу әдістері, соның ішінде құжаттар мен сұхбаттардың мазмұнын талдау қолданылады. Құжаттарда да, сұхбатқа жауаптарда да, халықаралық қатынастарға конструктивтік көзқарасқа сәйкес, Жапонияның ОА аймағында және тиісті елдерде өзін қалай анықтайтындығы және алға жылжытатындығы, сондай-ақ жария дипломатияны сәйкесінше қоғамдық күш құралы ретінде пайдалану туралы дәлелдер сұралды.

Авторлар Жапонияның Өзбекстан мен Қазақстанда, соның ішінде білім беру, аймақтағы экономикалық даму, саяси реформалар және энергетикалық ресурстар саласындағы ынтымақтастықты қоса алғанда бірнеше мүдделері бар деген қорытындыға келді. Жапонияның 2015 жылғы жаңа бастамасына сүйене отырып, Орталық Азия елдері мен Жапония өсіп келе жатқан дипломатиялық қатынастармен серіктестік қатынастар орнатты. Талданған құжаттар Жапонияның Орталық Азияға деген қызығушылығы жоғары емес екенін көрсеткендей болғанымен, іске асырылған жобалардың болуы керісін куәландырады.

**Түйін сөздер:** Орта Азия, Қазақстан, Өзбекстан, Жапония, қоғамдық дипломатия.

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### Публичная дипломатия Японии в Центральной Азии на примере Узбекистана и Казахстана

В данном исследовании основное внимание уделяется роли публичной дипломатии в формировании и реализации внешней политики Японии в Центральной Азии. Основываясь на элементах культурного сопереживания, Япония создает привлекательный имидж в Центральной Азии посредством активного использования ресурсов общественной дипломатии и официальной помощи в целях развития (ОПР). Ключевая проблема заключается в том, что Япония использует публичную дипломатию в Центральной Азии более активно, чем это официально указано.

Динамика развития внешнеполитических отношений между Японией и Центральной Азией (ЦА) исследуется на примерах Казахстана и Узбекистана с акцентом на общие направления сотрудничества и проявления публичной дипломатии в двух странах. В работе используются качественные методы исследования, включая анализ содержания документов и интервью. Как в документах, так и в ответах на интервью, в соответствии с конструктивистским подходом к международным отношениям, были запрошены доказательства того, как Япония идентифицирует и продвигает себя в регионе ЦА и соответствующих странах, а также об использовании публичной дипломатии в качестве инструмента общественной силы, соответственно.

Авторы пришли к выводу, что у Японии есть несколько областей интересов в Узбекистане и Казахстане, включая сотрудничество в области образования, экономического развития в регионе, политических реформ и энергетических ресурсов. Следуя новой инициативе Японии 2015 года, страны Центральной Азии и Япония установили дипломатические отношения и партнерские отношения, которые продолжают расти. Несмотря на то, что проанализированные документы показывают, что интерес Японии к ЦА невысок, наличие реализованных проектов свидетельствует об обратном.

**Ключевые слова:** Центральная Азия, Казахстан, Узбекистан, Япония, публичная дипломатия.

## Introduction

Following the collapse of the USSR and the formation of new countries in the post-Soviet area, Japan quickly turned its attention to the Central Asian (CA) countries to obtain a stable place in the region and of gaining sympathies with both the leadership and the population of these countries. The need to develop relations with the new Central Asian Republics was explained by their geopolitical importance, their proximity to Russia, to the People's Republic of China and the Middle Eastern countries. However, due to concerns about the expansion of China's presence in Central Asia, especially after Beijing launched the "One Belt One Way" initiative, Japan started more actively using public diplomacy as an instrument in the CA region.

According to the former Foreign Minister of Japan, Yoriko Kawaguchi: "Japan is a natural Central Asian partner because it is a country that does not use military force, a country with no political, territorial, and other potential sources of conflict with Central Asian countries. It has only efforts to promote their own-initiative development and regional cooperation as a condition for such development." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan,

2004). This highlights how Japan understands itself and its foreign-political identity vis-à-vis the Central Asian region, how the country is positioning itself. This approach and understanding are at the heart of the dialogue initiatives in Central Asia and Japan, where the main role is devoted to the paradigm of the new public diplomacy, which began to appear in 2004, while the second boom has been accompanied by the foreign policy priorities of Shinzo Abe since 2015.

Many studies have been published in recent years, addressing the foreign policy of the various Asian countries. These studies focus mainly on Asian countries and areas that historically were focused heavily on China, Japan, and South Korea in East Asia. However, only a few studies go beyond the areas traditionally covered. Japan's policy in Central Asia remains a relatively poorly studied aspect, which is due to the fact that Japan's policy history in the region is not rich insignificant events and surprising initiatives. Today, the related works, which are mainly studies, are already dedicated to more specific topics, such as Japan's interest in the Central Asian region or its ongoing diplomacy to the region (Len, 2008; Kawato, 2008; Heng, 2010). Therefore, the intention of this article is to

research if Japan uses public diplomacy in Central Asia more actively than is officially defined. Public diplomacy in the framework of work is understood as national cultural and educational undertakings and statements aimed at projecting this country's role as an important partner for cooperation.

### **Researching Japan in Central Asia**

The paper utilizes the theoretical approach of the social constructivism of international relations, and articles of the most renowned authors, including Alexander Wendt (Wendt, 1992) and the interpretation of books (Wendt, 1999), and Nicholas Onuf (Onuf, 1989), John Ruggie (Ruggie, 1998), and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Checkel, 1999) expressed. The central premise that power in international relations does not mean as much the capacity for physical coercion, as the ability to build social structures that enable the desired depictions of the international environment to be strengthened and objectively determined, thereby affecting other identities, motivations, and behavior. The interests of political actors are based not so much on calculating rational decisions, but on relationships, ideas, and behavioral norms stemming from interactions with the community they are in. Within the approach of social constructivists, national culture, national values, and foreign policy activities are regarded as resources for public diplomacy as long as the latter does not contradict these values.

But in order to clarify the link between the constructiveness theory and public diplomacy, Peter van Ham's concept of social power (Van Ham, 2010, 136-138) was used in the context of the social constructivism theory, where other actors are influenced by non-violent means when creating their image and identity. The successful use of the concept of social power makes it possible to bridge a link between social constructivism and empirically to assess Japanese behavior and motivations in Central Asia and, in particular, relations with the two countries under consideration. The correlation between Japan's efforts to view the Central Asia region as a single entity and the two selected countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, to be analyzed for this work is based on the fact that Japan has the longest-standing dialogue and diplomatic history from all Central Asian countries. Therefore, the most extensive material is available. Moreover, as further analysis will demonstrate, Japan sees all five Central Asian countries as a single region and attributes them a common approach.

The article will look at Japan's public diplomacy, using Japan's foreign policy priorities for the period 2015-2019, the official development assistance (ODA) reports, the bilateral agreements between Japan and each country, as well as interviews conducted for this research. This will make it possible to identify how Japan sees and justifies its interaction with the countries in question and the Central Asian region as a whole. Finally, the analysis in the article will lead to the conclusion of Japan's definition of its role and the exercise of social power through public diplomacy to play a role and position itself in the Central Asian region. This also allows the identification of the extent to which Japan uses public diplomacy directly in Central Asia and how much it is reflected in national documents.

The empirical research of this work is based on qualitative study methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews. Foreign policy documents and interviews allow revealing Japan's foreign policy identity and the use of public diplomacy as a social power in relations with Central Asian countries. Work will be based on the accounts of the Japanese Foundation for 2015-2018, the Japan Foreign Affairs Institute strategies for 2015-2019 or the Japan Blue Paper reports (2015-2019), the reports on Japan's external relations with Central Asia 2016, the Japan Official Development Assistance Reports and the Japan-Uzbekistan Cooperation Agreements/Japan-Kazakhstan Cooperation Agreements contracts.

In addition, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with four representatives of Japan's foreign policy: Japan's Extraordinary and Authorized Ambassador to Uzbekistan, Tatushiko Kasai, Japan's Extraordinary and Authorized Ambassador in Kazakhstan, Yasuhiro Kawaguchi, Japanese Extraordinary and Authorized Ambassador to Latvia, Kyoko Kuwahara, Communications Director of the Japan Institute for International Relations, as well as with Kudratov Laziz Shavkatovich, First Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Two expert interviews complemented interviews with officials in Kazakhstan.

### **Central Asia as region of interest for Japan**

Japan's policy on Central Asia began with the help of Japan's ODA for five Central Asian countries in 1993, where it was initially \$2.57 million, but already in 2008, it reached \$108.48 million (Nazarmuhamedov, 2018, 170-171). The first official

Japanese strategy for Central Asia emerged in 1997 under the management of Ryutaro Hashimoto, who proposed the launch of the so-called “Eurasia Diplomacy”. The current phase of Japan’s Central Asia engagement started in 2004 when the Central Asia-Japan dialogue started developing. That same year, Central Asia and the Caucasus Division was established at Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the current stage, Japan interacts with Central Asia Republics at three levels: diplomatic/political communications; trade and investment; Development Assistance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2019). Current trade trends, investments, and Japan’s ODA assistance to Central Asian countries reveal that the region has not yet reached a major role in shaping Japan’s foreign policy, but this does not prevent Japan from pursuing public diplomacy in the region. The region’s two largest, most populous and resource-rich countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – make up the majority of Japan’s direct investment and ODA in Central Asia. Interestingly, judging by figures from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan in 2018, Japan’s ODA in Uzbekistan was higher than reported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

Japan’s new strategic direction continued to be developed by Junichiro Koizumi, together with the foreign minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, and Taro Aso, during their visit to Central Asia in 2004. Based on the “Eurasia Diplomacy Initiative,” the current program “Central Asia + Japan” initiative was developed. In addition, the dialogue has played a unique historical role as a prototype for Central Asian dialogue platforms with the Republic of Korea, the European Union, and other international partners (Dissjukov, 2019, 2). Namely, the dialogue operates as know-how for Central Asian diplomatic action (see, Starr, 2017).

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Taro Aso often highlighted the importance of modern culture as exploiting the potential of diplomatic resources: “We live in an era when public opinion formed by ordinary people has a big impact on public diplomacy” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006). Despite Japan trying to position itself as a friendly country without selfish goals since activating its public diplomacy, the link of public diplomacy to Japan’s economic interests in the region is clear. Japan is attracted by natural resources, which, according to Japan itself, was not the main priority in shaping policy in the region. Tokyo is interested in importing uranium and rare-earth metals. Japanese companies are engaged in developing oil, gas, and

uranium deposits and operate in sectors such as the chemical industry, construction industry, and light-industry mechanical engineering. By highlighting economic development, Japan decided to reach a new level of foreign policy, thus creating one of the areas of cooperation between the countries of Japan and Central Asia (Kasai, 2020).

Japan does not have an ambitious regional policy; instead, Japan prefers to strengthen bilateral relations, particularly in the fields of transport, industry, and energy, by concluding specific agreements and promoting concrete projects. In this respect, Japan’s policies and investments in Central Asia will ultimately contribute to the development of the region and balance the growing role of other players, such as China, and giving the CA countries an alternative cooperation partner. Japan supports Central Asia with an “open, stable, and self-sustaining development” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2011). The three pillars of Japan’s diplomacy in Central Asia are the permanent strengthening of bilateral relations, promoting regional cooperation and investment in common regional affairs through the “Central Asia plus Japan” dialogue, and global cooperation. On the other hand, Japan’s foreign policy course in Central Asia consists of three main components: political dialogue to deepen trust and understanding, economic cooperation, and cooperation in the development of natural resources, reaching peace in a region with nuclear proliferation, democratization, and stabilization.

In addition to its diplomatic and political efforts, Japan provides assistance to Central Asian countries under the global aid programme. According to this, Japan’s support for Central Asia following the new foreign policy by Shinzo Abe since 2018, shows Japan’s efforts to contribute to regional development and to strengthen economic relations between Central Asian countries and Japan. In this respect, it is important to analyze the latest trends. For example, the Prime Minister of Japan visited the Central Asian countries in 2015, resulting in the signing of several contracts for energy and infrastructure jobs worth around \$45 billion after his visit. (Taldybayeva, 2016)

In 2004 the Japanese Government put forward a “Central Asia + Japan” initiative aimed at strengthening political influence and economic expansion in order to take a leading position in energy development and trade relations. By combining work with youth and dialogue with government representatives, Tokyo is strengthening public diplomacy in the region. The format applies to all CA countries and includes all elements of public

diplomacy that are public relations abroad, peace-keeping efforts, cultural exchanges, people-to-people exchanges, sub-categorization cooperation with international cultural organizations, assistance for cultural grants and support of ODA. The opening of the Central Asia-Japan Dialogue in 2004 contributed to the development of a common approach to cultural interaction with countries in the region. Firstly, cultural and humanitarian exchanges are allocated in an independent direction. Secondly, in 2004, Foreign Minister Kawaguchi, for instance, announced that Japan plans to host 1,000 interns from Central Asia (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2004) within 3 years.

Through education programs, Tokyo is cooperating with young people from Central Asia and building a new generation of political and business elites familiar with Japan and willing to cooperate. Another justification for the fact that the Central Asia-plus Japan dialogue is part of the public diplomacy measures is explained by the fact that, in the framework of this dialogue, Japan chaired meetings of foreign ministers 5 times and meetings of senior officials 11 times. Secondly, “Central Asia + Japan” dialogue is one of the most known and successful instruments of positioning Japan’s image, mostly because it shaped Japan’s foreign policy until S. Abe changed its foreign policy priorities.

### **Japanese Public Diplomacy in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan**

The question, how Japan uses its public diplomacy in the region and particularly in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, is still to be investigated in this chapter. In the relation between Japan and Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, historical and cultural links highlighted by the leaders of all three countries can be identified. There are multiple paths of engagement, besides traditional economic and political communication aimed at building Japan’s image in the CA region. Therefore, inspired by the “Diplomatic Bluebooks” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019), Japan’s public diplomacy towards Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan can be broken down to five key categories that correspond to forms of public diplomacy: official visits and forums, exchanges of post-war experiences, cultural exchange, people-to-people relations, and the ODA. Findings on each of these are further summarized.

The first activity Japan uses in the framework of public diplomacy in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are *official visits and forums*. During the visits,

dissemination of information on Japan, public speeches, and statements, as well as articles in local media, are widely used for publicity purposes. Looking at the measures taken by Japan, it can be seen that, first of all, public diplomacy is being promoted through high-level summits: “Over the last 30 years, there has been a very good relationship between Japan and Uzbekistan. They have been formed good because we have built a base – by sharing visits at the highest level, we pay attention and demonstrate the importance of the relationship (Fujiyama, 2020). According to him, the visits made, for instance, Japan-Kazakhstan relations a strategic partnership (Fujiyama, 2020).

It should be noted that, on the Uzbek side, it is also confirmed that these activities are capable of developing a more high-quality and mutually binding dialogue: “Uzbekistan has always tried to maximize its interest in the strategic level of bilateral relations by engaging in summits.” (Shavkatovich, 2020). This is based on the fact that public relations between Japan and Uzbekistan allow for the creation of a basis for the implementation and development of strategically important common projects for infrastructure and the social environment. It should be noted that it is also approved on the part of Kazakhstan, as summits are one of the tools and tools for developing a more qualitative and mutually binding dialogue.

Official visits take place, of course, in both directions, on his part, the Republic of Uzbekistan’s first president, Islam Karimov, visited Japan more than three times. The organization of such measures on the Japanese and Uzbek side shows not only the interest of official countries that exist between countries but also has a positive impact on public thought, creating a positive image for the country. It is clear that Japan’s public diplomacy aims to increase its presence and to increase the number of supporters in the region, which is why Japan is organizing events, cultural exchanges, and people exchanges (Kuwahara, 2020).

As a third point of this kind, the fact is that the popularity of forums organized by Japan and interparliamentary links between countries is increasing in recent years. A good example of this is the fact that the Parliamentary Friendship League of Japan with Uzbekistan operates in the Japanese Parliament, which organizes forums for strengthening bilateral relations and promoting new strategies and projects: “Interparliamentary relations are evolving, once using these forums and one of the most notable examples is the Tokyo Interparliamentary Forum in 2010” (Shavkatovich,

2020). Diplomats emphasize also that Shavkat Mirziyoyev's official visit to Japan served as a good indicator for strengthening and further developing relations between the two countries, including in the humanitarian field (Kawaguchi, 2020). Moreover, the interviewed diplomat explained that the welfare of Uzbekistan is not only a task of the country alone, but it is also important for the whole world: "In Uzbekistan, almost everyone speaks several languages. Uzbekistan is a multi-nation nation, nationality, and culture, so Uzbekistan can be seen as a gem with its many facets, and that is exactly what the modern world needs today." (Kawaguchi, 2020). The examples listed above show that Japan's use of official visits instruments readily forms and implements public diplomacy in the region, positioning itself as a responsible and friendly country for Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This leads to the conclusion that Japan understands how it can shape its image in the CA and build on established relationships.

The second form of public diplomacy, demonstrating the expression of Japan's public role, involves *exchanges of post-war experiences of Japan*. It is not only about conventional peacekeeping and peace-promoting, but also regarding the tragic moments in the history of countries. As a common element in relations between Japan and Kazakhstan are "sad experiences in the use of nuclear weapons" and therefore they cooperate as permanent members of the UN Security Council and co-chair of the conference to facilitate the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, as well as support nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in the international arena (Kasai, 2020). In addition, Japan organized an exhibition in Kazakhstan for the commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which was presented in Almaty and Semey in 2014 and 2016 and dedicated to the victims of the 1945 atomic bombs. It featured photographs showing tragic consequences in two cities, video chronicles, documentaries about the devastation caused by atomic disasters and bombings, surviving diaries, "Hibakh Voice" with eyewitness stories about Hiroshima explosions and paper cranes that are Japan's symbol of healing. In addition, it can be pointed out that Kazakhstan is also concerned about shared ideas and the same position as Japan: "Japan is seeking to maintain regional stability through the UN, while Kazakhstan supports this because it is also interested in the entry into force of the nuclear test ban agreement" (Ibrajeva, 2020).

In October 2015, Prime Minister Abe visited five Central Asian countries emphasizing that "Japan is

positioning itself as a good friend for CA countries." (Abe, 2017). It should be noted that in 2019 Japan's presentation of public diplomacy still included the "friend terminology" and emphasis on historical ties with the CA region: "The stories of friendship between Japanese prisoners of war and local residents have a profound impact on many Japanese people. Similarly, the views of the Kazakh and Uzbek people in Japan are positive partly because of this historical aspect." (Kawaguchi, 2020).

The third element in Japan's realized public diplomacy in Uzbekistan is *cultural exchange*. It is implemented through international exchanges, such as sending Japanese education professionals abroad, training language teachers and students, as well as donations and the development of new Japanese language teaching materials and organizing Japanese language competitions: "Two main things that Japan prioritizes in its public diplomacy and has been developed in various events are cultural and human exchange" (Kuwahara, 2020). Mostly, though, if analyzing Japan's cultural exchange, it can be attributed to Japanese government support for research abroad related to Japanese politics, economics, society, and culture, which can also be released as a separate sub-category. For example, "Over 1700 Uzbek learn the Japanese language in Uzbekistan. And there's a tendency in Japan to increase the number of tourists in your countries." (Fujiyama, 2020). Cultural exchange and human exchange are interrelated areas within Japan's public diplomacy, so they often cannot be separated from one another, but it can be seen clearly that these two forms of Japanese public diplomacy remain a priority in their guidelines, as has been shown by interviews with Japanese ambassadors. The same tactics and approaches are also used in Kazakhstan. Promoting cultural elements with a view to becoming familiar with the beauty and attractiveness of Japanese culture is among the central elements. In this respect, the main hub of Kazakhstan, the human resources development centre for Kazakhstan and Japan, opened in 2000.

The fourth form of Japanese public diplomacy involves *people-to-people relations*. For instance, Japan recruited 9668 trainees from the Central Asian countries, particularly from Kazakhstan, and seconded 2587 specialists between 1992 and 2017. (Kishida, 2017). Cultural exchanges and students from Central Asia, who have obtained a master's degree in Japanese universities with Japanese support, now hold leadership positions in government and business, including ministers and vice-prime ministers, and play an important role in

building a new state (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2015). In parallel with the importance of the positive image of Japan among Kazakh and Uzbek decision-makers and professionals, Japan is also investing in the general population of CA countries. In February 2019, the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a survey on attitude towards Japan in four countries: Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and Tajikistan. 22% of respondents described relations with Japan as “very friendly” and 42% as “somewhat friendly.” 17% responded that Japan is “a very loyal friend of their country,” 44% – “a little trusted.” In addition, 79% of respondents have welcomed Japan’s activities since 2004 in the Central Asian countries in the framework of the “Central Asia + Japan Dialogue,” saying that they contribute to the development of regional cooperation” (Kawaguchi, 2020). In the case of CA countries, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, they see “friends” in Japan and the relationship as friendly, leading to the conclusion that Japan’s public diplomacy is successful in helping to construct Japan’s image in the CA countries.

Finally, an important way to explain how Japan implements its public diplomacy is *ODA*. It should be mentioned that the responsible body is the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and Japanese ODA to CA means 1) preferential loans, 2) free assistance or grants, 3) technical assistance providing for the transmission of experts, the preparation of feasibility studies, the carrying out of studies, in-depth training centers in Japan. ODA related projects in both observed countries have become important as they provide for the modernization of many spheres, as well as cooperation in the medical, educational, cultural and cultural fields.

This is also one of the main ways how Japan is linked to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan: “In Uzbekistan, Japan was mainly associated with JICA, and Japan is also interested in taking initiatives in one way or another through JICA. (...) Over the last four years, more than 130 projects worth more than 82 million dollars have been implemented in terms of infrastructure and for public interest projects” (Shavkatovich, 2020). This makes it possible to explain that Japan sees itself in the region as a favorable country for cooperation, it justifies its interaction in Uzbekistan and the Central Asian region through the use of public diplomacy, through the implementation of the main forms of public diplomacy for Uzbekistan: public relations, cultural and human exchange and the ODA. In Kazakhstan, on the other hand, the Japanese government

provided free financial assistance of about \$65.4 million, as well as technical assistance of \$67.8 million (Baudarbek-Kozhatayev, 2016). In addition, there are 74 branches and representative offices in Kazakhstan, with Japan participating in areas such as oil, gas, petrochemical, metallurgy, finance, mining, car wholesale, telecommunications, wholesale of equipment, forestry, logistics, medicine, and agriculture.

### Conclusion/Implications/Recommendations

Since the end of the 20th century, cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and Japan has grown steadily, as evidenced by the level of official contacts. It can be concluded that Japan positions its role in relations with Central Asian countries through a “friendship” terminology, which it forms through public diplomacy, i.e., social power, if referencing the social constructivist theoretical approach. There are five forms of expression for Japanese public diplomacy, which it directs to different regions and countries, including the CA. The key message from Japan’s ongoing public diplomacy on CA is that Japan is trying to position itself as a “friend” in relations with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and thus also the CA region. At the same time, Japan is trying not to highlight its activities. Hence, Japan can be defined as a kind of “dark horse” that implements politics and forms dialogues, but at the same time, it is not formally expressed in the documents and the absence of its role and interest.

The fact that the presence of Japanese public diplomacy in Central Asia, and in particular Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, is greater than stated in official documents, shows a number of observations. Firstly, Japan has a number of areas of interest in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, including cooperation in the field of education, economic development in the region, political reforms, and energy resources, but it is mentioned in its official documents and highlighted very marginally. On the other hand, following the Uzbek and Kazakhstan’s action plans as well as the representatives of the foreign political community, it can be concluded that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are priorities for Japan. Secondly, as part of the work, it was concluded that Japan is positioning its role in relations with CA through the “friend” model it forms through public diplomacy and social power. By analyzing the resulting interviews, Japan is positioning itself as a “friend” and preferring to remain a defining friend rather than a partner.

Thirdly, Japan’s historical and cultural differences did not become an obstacle to the

adaptation and development of the concept of social power and public diplomacy in the Central Asian states. Today, politicians view the mechanisms of public diplomacy to a foreign audience as an important means of gaining leadership in world politics, economics, and culture. In addition, methods of using national traditions enriched public diplomacy that enables Japan to make significant progress in this area. At the same time, Japan, in its public diplomacy, places an important role in the implementation of economic cooperation programmes, thereby supplementing the classical understanding of this concept.

Looking at the data as a whole, it can be concluded that Japan has been consistently aware of the potential of this region since the establishment of diplomatic relations in Central Asia. Initially acting on a favorable basis because it doesn't have a negative historical past, Japan positioned itself as a neutral player without making immediate targets and not positioning its country's political ambitions in the region. Japan stressed how it is configured in the long term and prioritized building friendly relations with countries in the region.

The historical and cultural proximity of Japan and Central Asia has become a starting point for the development of social power and, consequently, public diplomacy policies in relation to the countries of the region. Japan willingly uses near-term rhetoric with Central Asia, positioning Japan's post-war development model as an example of replicating countries in the region. On this basis, Japan promotes the most attractive aspects of its image, such as economic development, democratization (with Eastern characteristics),

advanced technology, environmental protection, and attention to socio-economic issues. Japan is stepping up its image with significant amounts of economic aid for the region's needs, is one of the leading donor countries. A significant part of this assistance comes from human security projects, in which Japan is one of the world's leaders. Attention is also paid to ODA cultural grants aimed not only at preserving the region's cultural heritage but also at promoting Japan and the Japanese language. The popularity of culture and art, the functioning of human resources development centers, the active humanitarian exchanges demonstrate the interest of the people of the region in Japan, while Japan's image and its values, as well as the commitments it demonstrates, have an impact on the people of Central Asian countries.

Japan has always been considered a strategic partner for most Central Asian countries, but in many cases, cooperation was limited to financial assistance and technical grants and assistance programmes. Japan's national challenges, such as the economic slowdown and aging population, continue to put pressure on Japan's economy. Given the considerable emphasis on development aid programmes that Japan places on its public diplomacy, it foresees that the attractiveness of the image abroad will depend to a large extent on successful economic reforms in the country. This is tied with the ability of the Japanese government to invest in the success of promoting Japan's traditional culture and country's image as a "peace and welfare centered state." Hence, the continuation of the success of Japanese worldwide influence via public diplomacy is still to be observed and investigated.

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