

## IMPORTANCE OF “ONE BELT, ONE ROAD” INITIATIVE FOR CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

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**Abstract.** In this research paper, analytical thoughts are presented about the special role of Central Asia, especially Uzbekistan, in China's “One belt, one road” initiative. The initiative includes multilateral support, in particular, the organization of international foreign economic relations on the basis of mechanisms that allow each country to enjoy benefits in relations with all partners. China's initiative opened a new field for cooperation. This is evidenced by the fact that the initiative focuses on many areas of key development challenges, promotes comprehensive interdependence and connectivity, and helps countries overcome existing challenges and implement the sustainable development agenda. In other words, it was mentioned that this initiative will become an important way to ensure economic growth in the whole world, in particular, in Uzbekistan, and positive results were obtained.

**Key words:** People's Republic of China, One belt, one road, Great silk road, Mediterranean Sea, foreign policy, memorandum, World Trade Organization, socio-economic development, Food and Agriculture Organization, UNESCO.

By the 21st century, consistent implementation of mutually beneficial cooperation in the development and foreign policy of countries remains one of the most important issues. The People's Republic of China (PRC) maintains strong relations with various countries from Asia to the Americas and promotes many reforms and initiatives through its diplomacy. We can see this in the example of “One belt, one road”. This initiative is inextricably linked with the long history of modern China and was formed under the influence of the ancient Silk Road. The figurative phrase “Silk Road” has been used for several years in relation to transport corridors claiming historical importance, and it was introduced into scientific circulation only in the last quarter of

the XIX century<sup>6</sup>. Historically, Central Asia was located at the crossroads of the Great Silk Road, and there was constant trade, exchange and cultural exchanges with China<sup>7</sup>.

The total length of this road, stretching from China to the northern shores of the Mediterranean Sea, is 12,000 km, and allows establishing multifaceted relations between many people and countries. The Great Silk Road is a symbol of communication between the East and the West, and it is the common historical and cultural heritage of all countries of the world.

The “One belt, one road” initiative envisages the implementation of integration projects both with countries with direct access to the sea and with countries located inside the continent. Therefore, it is divided into two areas such as “Silk Road Economic Belt”<sup>8</sup> and “Sea Silk Road in the 21st Century”. This initiative preceded the initiative to jointly create “One belt, one road” (The Silk Road Economic Area and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road) during the visit of the President of the People’s Republic of China, Xi Jinping, to Central and Southeast Asia (Kazakhstan and Indonesia) in September and October 2013.

Uzbekistan’s position on “One belt, one road” is in line with the main priorities of our country to deepen comprehensive strategic partnership with China. China is one of the leading trade-economic and investment partners of Uzbekistan<sup>9</sup>. According to statistics published by China at the end of 2022, the Chinese side imported Uzbek gas in the amount of \$1.07 billion. More than a thousand enterprises with Chinese investment are operating on the territory of Uzbekistan. The total volume of Chinese investments in the economy of Uzbekistan exceeds \$11 billion.

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<sup>6</sup> Савченко В.С., Смолина Е.С Великий шёлковый путь: история и экономика. // Гуманитарные исследования . – 2015. - №1 – С.124.

<sup>7</sup> Муртазаева Р.Х. История Узбекистана. Ташкент: 2005, - Б. 86. [In Russian: Murtazaeva, R.Kh. History of Uzbekistan. Tashkent, 2005, p. 86].

<sup>8</sup> Mickey G. China’s “One belt, one road” initiative : what a difference D.Brand can make. Researchgate, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> Совместное заявления Республики Узбекистан И китайской Народной Республики о дальнейшем углублении отношений всестороннего стратегического партнерства. 14 мая 2017 г. // Веб-сайт Национальной бази законодательства Республики Uzbekistan – [www.lex.uz](http://www.lex.uz).

The PRC conducts an active and extensive foreign policy in Central Asia,<sup>10</sup> and “One belt, one road” initiative, even after 10 years, has become a huge project that unites 148 countries and 31 international organizations, representing 63% of the world’s population. It covered countries with “new economy” as well as developed and developing countries.

According to the General Administration of Customs of the PRC, the trade turnover with China and 5 countries of Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – increased by 37.4% in the first four months of 2023 compared to the same period of 2022. It should be noted that by the end of 2022, China’s trade volume with the five countries of Central Asia amounted to \$70.2 billion, showing a nearly 100-fold increase from 30 years ago.

In particular, the import of agricultural, energy and mineral products of the PRC from Central Asian countries increased by more than 50%, and the export of technology and electronic products to these 5 countries increased by 42%. Also, China’s direct investments in these countries amounted to approximately \$15 billion.

China has directed its investments in many sectors of the economy of Central Asian countries, including infrastructure, mining and metallurgy, mechanical engineering, chemistry, textiles, construction industry, processing and manufacturing, digital technologies and other fields.

According to experts, China is trying to develop its Western region and gain economic benefits through the “One belt, one road” initiative.

Over the past ten years, **Kyrgyzstan** has implemented many projects with China within the framework of the “One Belt, and One Road” initiative. In particular, the “Datka-Kemin” power transmission line was built at the expense of the PRC government grant, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan highway was modernized, and more than 200 kilometers of Bishkek roads were reconstructed. Also, the rural irrigation system was reconstructed on an area of more than 5,000 hectares in Botken,

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<sup>10</sup> В Пекине начался форум "Один пояс, один путь". 14 май 2017 г. // Веб-сайт Национального информационного агентства Узбекистана (Уза) – [www.uza.uz](http://www.uza.uz).

Issyk-Kul, Chuy and Talas regions with grant funds. A surgical hospital was built in Osh, and 100 modern fire engines were delivered to Kyrgyzstan on February 1, 2023. An alternative road from north to south is being built. The Chuy bypass project and the construction of the Norinda logistics center are being discussed. Also, two mobile hospitals are expected to be transferred from China to Kyrgyzstan this year.

Also, the “China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan” railway project is of great importance. The implementation of this project will provide Kyrgyzstan with the opportunity to create 20,000 additional jobs and increase the volume of transported goods to 15 million tons per year<sup>11</sup>.

According to the Memorandum signed in September 2014 between the Ministry of Economic Development of **Tajikistan** and the State Committee for Development and Reforms of the PRC, the implementation of the initiative is an important opportunity for the economic development of the country.

Negotiations on the construction of a railway connecting China and Tajikistan are ongoing. Currently, reconstruction and construction of transport infrastructure is underway in Tajikistan with the participation of Chinese investment (including the Kulma-Khorog-Kolob-Dushanbe and Dushanbe-Khojand-Chanok highways), as well as the construction of the Dushanbe-2 thermal power plant. also, projects such as the Rogun Dam power generator, the district heating system, and the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan CASA-1000 power transmission line have been completed or are about to be completed.

According to the Central Asia Data-Gathering and Analysis Team (Central Asia Data-Gathering and Analysis Team), there are 44 Chinese-invested or ongoing projects in Tajikistan. For example, the reconstruction of the highway between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, the highway leading to Afghanistan, the construction of tunnels under mountain passes, the restoration and reconstruction of the Dushanbe-China highway and the Vahdat-Yuvon railway are among the projects implemented within the

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<sup>11</sup> Государственное агентство по геологии и минеральным ресурсам при министерстве энергетики и промышленности Кыргызской Республики. URL: [www.geology.kg](http://www.geology.kg) (дата обращения: 20.05.2021).

framework of “Belt and Road”. These projects are important for the use of the geographic location of Tajikistan and its integration with neighboring countries<sup>12</sup>.

According to experts, the 8% growth of the gross domestic product in Tajikistan in 2022 and 6.5% growth forecast for 2023 indicate the growing influence of the “One belt, one road” in the country.

Tajikistan owes nearly \$3.3 billion to foreign investors, most of which is owed to China’s State Export-Import Bank (Eximbank).

**Turkmenistan** considers China to be one of its most important partners and one of the priorities of its foreign economic policy. In particular, the “One belt, one road” initiative is in harmony with the national socio-economic development plan of Turkmenistan for the period of 2022-2028 and 2022-2052, the strategy of diversification of the national economy and the foreign trade strategy for the period of 2021-2030.

Through this project, Turkmenistan aims to transform the country from an agricultural country to an industrial country, integrate and expand stable international transport cooperation, become one of the transport and communication centers in the East-West and North, and become a member of the World Trade Organization<sup>13</sup>.

Turkmenistan’s wealth of natural gas and the country’s accessibility from Western Asia, the Middle East, and Europe make it important in terms of energy and transportation. In particular, in 2022, Turkmenistan exported natural gas to China in the amount of 10 billion 250 million dollars, which is 51% more than in 2021<sup>14</sup>.

**Kazakhstan** is one of the most important links of China’s “Belt and Road” initiative, and within the framework of the initiative, large-scale project development and diversification of the economy of Kazakhstan are being implemented between the two countries. Chinese investments have become the driving force of the region’s

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<sup>12</sup> Бишкек заявил о применении пыток в Таджикистане к задержанным из Киргизии // Интерфакс. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/765085> (дата обращения 27.04.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Туркменбашинский международный морской порт. // Официальный сайт Туркменбашинского международного морского порта. URL: <https://port.com.tm/ru/главная/> (дата обращения: 01.05.2021)

<sup>14</sup> Основные газопроводы Туркменистана // Официальный сайт МИД Туркменистана. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/ru/articles/84> (дата обращения 30.11.2020).

development and are increasingly changing not only the region itself, but also its place in the world economy.

In Kazakhstan, after 2013, the share of export of goods also achieved significantly positive results.

❖ **Khimprom:** China's market share in the supply of organic chemicals increased from 3 percent to 59 percent. This is undoubtedly the result of the launch of a number of joint investment projects in the chemical industry;

❖ **Agroprom:** the export of agricultural and food industry products to the Chinese market, the share of exports to China in 2023 was only 4 percent, while in 2013 there was no export at all. The share of the Chinese market in Kazakhstan's exports increased from 13% to 33% in oilseeds, from 0% to 57% in the supply of oil, from 3% to 39% in animal feed, and from 66% to 85% in the supply of wool.

❖ **Metallurgy.** China's share in Kazakhstan's ore exports increased from 44% to 69%, copper from 56% to 61%, its share in iron exports remained almost unchanged (17%).

For Uzbekistan, the "One belt, one road" initiative is important in the implementation of investment projects aimed at innovative development of the national economy, technological modernization of production facilities, and increasing the country's export potential.

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping as part of his participation in the second meeting of the "One belt, one road" forum held in Beijing on April 26-27, 2019<sup>15</sup>.

As Xi Jinping noted at the meeting, China considers Uzbekistan an important strategic partner and is ready to make joint efforts to achieve common development and prosperity, and to ensure peace and stability in Central Asia.

According to the Chinese leader, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev can be called one of the founders of the "One belt, one road" initiative, and the attention paid to

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<sup>15</sup> Shavkat Mirziyoyev: nashi narodi doljni na dele oshushat' rezul'tati sovmestnix usiliy. 27 aprelya 2019 g. // Veb-sayt Nasional'nogo informatsionnogo agentstva Uzbekistana (UzA) – [www.uza.uz](http://www.uza.uz).

Uzbekistan's participation in the forum indicates that the relations between the two countries are at a high level.

In his speech at the international forum, the President of Uzbekistan put forward a number of important initiatives aimed at increasing interdependence in Central Asia, solving food security problems, meeting the urgent social needs of the population, and developing cultural-humanitarian and tourist relations<sup>16</sup>.

First, it is important to maximize the transport potential of Central Asia and to form the economic corridor "China-Central Asia-West Asia".

Secondly, the establishment of a joint center for the development of "smart" agriculture and agro-innovations. Ensuring food security in the face of climate change is one of the most important development challenges in the modern world. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the main threats to food security in Central Asia are soil degradation, water scarcity and outdated approaches to agriculture.

In such conditions, it is important to ensure the introduction of the most modern agricultural technologies, which allow to save water resources, increase crop productivity and resistance of plants to diseases.

Research in advanced areas of modern science and innovation requires large financial and other resources. Their size is often unbearable even for some developed countries.

Currently, the PRC is already implementing an action plan for cooperation in the field of science, technology and innovation within the framework of "One belt, one road". It is planned to promote four major initiatives together with partners: scientific-technical and humanitarian exchange, establishment of joint laboratories, creation of technological parks and cooperation on technology transfer.

At the same time, it is important to ensure the growth of human capital and expand the educational opportunities of young people in solving the set tasks. It is necessary

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<sup>16</sup> Rousset M. La nouvelle Europe: Paris-Berlin-Moscou. Le continent paneuropéen face au choc des civilisations. - Paris: Godefroy de Bouillon, 2009. — p.355, 359;



to use the most advanced methods of training qualified personnel through the exchange of mutual experience, the organization of professional internships in technologically modern productions.

These tasks and a number of other relations can be solved by creating educational and production centers in which the leading universities of the Silk Road countries can participate. The solution to this issue will be implemented by the “Alliance of New Silk Road Universities”, which includes 167 universities in 39 countries participating in the project<sup>17</sup>.

Fourth, the development of tourism exchange. In order to achieve real results in the field of tourism, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed to establish the “Silk Road” international tourism association in Samarkand and organize “One belt, one road” tourism forums every year<sup>18</sup>.

In June 2018, on the initiative of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the International University of Tourism “Silk Road” was established in Samarkand. The university is the first international level university in the field of tourism in the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as in the Central Asian region<sup>19</sup>.

Uzbekistan has significant potential for tourism development. There are more than 7,400 objects of cultural heritage in the country, 209 of which are included in the UNESCO list. The republic has 11 national nature parks and state reserves, 12 nature reserves, 106 museums and many other tourist attractions<sup>20</sup>.

In this direction, active cooperation with “One belt, one road” countries opens great opportunities for Uzbekistan. According to the World Tourism Organization, China alone accounts for more than 20 percent of the total spending by travelers worldwide. They spent 250.6 billion dollars on tourism in 2017.

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<sup>17</sup> Дни узбекской культуры в Китае. 15 июля 2011 г. // Веб-сайт Национального информационного агентства Узбекистана (Уза) – [www.uza.uz](http://www.uza.uz).

<sup>18</sup> See: World Tourism Organization - <http://www.unwto.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Silk Road International University of tourism, news, 25TH TASHKENT INTERNATIONAL TOURISM FAIR “TOURISM ON THE SILK ROAD» - TITF-2019, <http://old.univ-silkroad.uz/en/yangiklar/295.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> Культурно-исторические памятники шести стран претендуют на внесение в Список объектов мирового наследия. 4 июня 2008 г. // Веб-сайт АО НК "Казинформ" – [www.inform.kz](http://www.inform.kz).



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