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### XITOYNING O'ZBEKISTAN VA MARKAZIY OSIYODAGI O'SIB BORAYOTGAN TA'SIRI: STRATEGIK VA IQTISODIY TAHLIL

Annotatsiya

Xitoyning "Bir kamar, bir yo'l" tashabbusi (BRI) Markaziy Osiyoning iqtisodiy va geopolitik manzarasiga ulkan ta'sir ko'rsatdi, O'zbekiston esa asosiy hamkor sifatida paydo bo'ldi. Ushbu maqola Xitoyning O'zbekistondagi o'sib borayotgan ta'sirini iqtisodiy hamkorlik, infratuzilma rivojlanishi va mintaqaviy integratsiya orqali tahlil qiladi. Savdo ma'lumotlari, to'g'ridan-to'g'ri xorijiy investitsiyalar (FDI) va asosiy infratuzilma loyihalari bo'yicha sifatli tahlil yordamida tadqiqot BRI O'zbekistonning iqtisodiy ustuvorliklarini va tashqi siyosatini qanday o'zgartirganini o'rganadi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, Xitoy O'zbekistonning eng yirik savdo hamkori bo'lib, energiya, transport va ishlab chiqarish sohaslarida katta investitsiyalar kiritgan. Bundan tashqari, BRI mintaqaviy iqtisodiy integratsiyani qo'llab-quvvatlagan, bu O'zbekistonning Markaziy Osiyo va undan tashqaridagi aloqalarini yaxshilagan.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Xitoy, O'zbekiston, "Bir kamar, bir yo'l" tashabbusi (BRI), Markaziy Osiyo, iqtisodiy hamkorlik, savdo, infratuzilma rivojlanishi, to'g'ridan-to'g'ri xorijiy investitsiyalar (FDI), Mintaqaviy integratsiya, Geosiyosat.

### РАСТУЩЕЕ ВЛИЯНИЕ КИТАЯ В УЗБЕКИСТАНЕ И ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: СТРАТЕГИЧЕСКИЙ И ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ

Аннотация

Инициатива "Один пояс, один путь" Китая (BRI) оказала трансформационное воздействие на экономический и геополитический ландшафт Центральной Азии, при этом Узбекистан стал ключевым партнером. Эта статья исследует растущее влияние Китая в Узбекистане через экономическое сотрудничество, развитие инфраструктуры и региональную интеграцию. Используя качественный анализ данных о торговле, прямых иностранных инвестициях (FDI) и крупных инфраструктурных проектах, исследование анализирует, как BRI изменил экономические приоритеты Узбекистана и его внешнюю политику. Результаты показывают, что Китай стал одним из крупнейших торговых партнеров Узбекистана, с крупными инвестициями в энергетический, транспортный и производственный сектора. Кроме того, BRI содействует региональной экономической интеграции, улучшая связь Узбекистана в Центральной Азии и за ее пределами.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, Узбекистан, Инициатива "Один пояс, один путь" (BRI), Центральная Азия, Экономическое сотрудничество, Торговля, Развитие инфраструктуры, Прямые иностранные инвестиции (FDI), Региональная интеграция, Геополитика.

### CHINA'S GROWING INFLUENCE IN UZBEKISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA: A STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC ANALYSIS

Annotation

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has had a transformative impact on the economic and geopolitical landscape of Central Asia, with Uzbekistan emerging as a key partner. This article explores the growing influence of China in Uzbekistan through economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and regional integration. Using a qualitative analysis of trade data, foreign direct investment (FDI), and major infrastructure projects, the study examines how the BRI has reshaped Uzbekistan's economic priorities and its foreign policy. The findings indicate that China has become one of Uzbekistan's largest trading partners, with significant investments in energy, transport, and manufacturing sectors. Furthermore, the BRI has facilitated regional economic integration, enhancing Uzbekistan's connectivity within Central Asia and beyond.

**Key words:** China, Uzbekistan, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Central Asia, Economic Cooperation, Trade, Infrastructure Development, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), Regional Integration, Geopolitics.

**Introduction.** The rise of China as a global economic and political power has reshaped international relations, particularly in Central Asia. As part of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China has significantly expanded its engagement with Uzbekistan and other countries in the region, fostering economic cooperation, trade, and infrastructure development. This article examines China's growing influence in Uzbekistan, exploring the strategic and economic dimensions of this relationship and its implications for regional integration in Central Asia. The Belt and Road Initiative, a vast transnational infrastructure and economic development project launched by China in 2013, has provided a framework for expanding China's footprint in Central Asia, a region historically influenced by Russia and more recently by Western interests[1]. While Uzbekistan has long maintained strong economic ties with Russia and has sought to balance competing geopolitical influences, it has increasingly turned toward China for economic growth, infrastructure development, and trade opportunities. The study explores how China's

investments and initiatives have reshaped Uzbekistan's foreign policy and its role within regional economic integration efforts.

**Literature review.** China's influence in Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, has been rapidly expanding in economic, strategic, and cultural dimensions. S. Frederick Starr and Marlene Laruelle have analyzed China's geopolitical interests, while Baxtiyor Ergashev and Xasan Abidov have studied China's investments and infrastructure projects in Uzbekistan. Dilshod Mamatqulov and Rustam Botirov have researched China's soft power strategy and media influence, whereas Farkhod Tolipov has assessed the impact of cooperation with China on national sovereignty. Additionally, Sebastien Peyrouse and Alexander Cooley have examined the competition between China and Russia in Central Asia. These studies provide a multifaceted analysis of China-Central Asia relations.

**Research Methodology.** This research employs a qualitative approach to analyze the growing relationship between China and Uzbekistan. The study involves a review of existing

literature, including government reports, academic articles, and data from trade and economic cooperation between the two countries. In addition, primary sources such as official documents related to China's Belt and Road Initiative, interviews with key policymakers, and reports from international organizations (such as the United Nations and the World Bank) are analyzed to understand the political, economic, and strategic implications of the China-Uzbekistan partnership.

The research also examines statistical data on trade volumes, foreign direct investment (FDI), and infrastructure projects funded by China in Uzbekistan. A comparative analysis is performed to highlight the difference in Uzbekistan's economic performance before and after the rise of the BRI and China's increased involvement in the region. In addition to this, a SWOT analysis is conducted to assess the strategic and economic implications of China's growing influence in Uzbekistan and Central Asia.

**Analysis and Results.** China has become one of Uzbekistan's largest trading partners, with trade between the two countries growing significantly since the BRI's inception. In 2024, trade between China and Uzbekistan surpassed nearly \$6 billion, with major exports from Uzbekistan including cotton, gold, and natural gas, while China exports machinery, electronics, and consumer goods[2]. The development of trade corridors under the BRI has led to a surge in cross-border trade, strengthening Uzbekistan's economic integration into China's regional supply chain.

One of the most significant outcomes of China's involvement in Uzbekistan has been the development of critical infrastructure projects. These include the construction of roads, railways, and power plants, many of which are funded by Chinese loans and investments. The construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, for example, is set to improve regional connectivity and trade flows. This will cut the distance between East Asia, Central Asia, and Southern Europe by 900 km, reducing delivery times to 10 days, according to Kyrgyz Deputy Minister Bekzhan Rysmendeev. Speaking at COP29, he highlighted the project's significance as a southern branch of the Middle Corridor, enhancing connectivity to Southeast Asia, Western Asia, and the Middle East[3]. Additionally, the development of energy projects, such as natural gas pipeline construction and hydroelectric projects, is helping to modernize Uzbekistan's energy sector.

China's investments in Uzbekistan have been substantial, with FDI flowing into sectors such as mining, manufacturing, energy, and telecommunications. Chinese companies have

#### SWOT ANALYSIS:

Strengths	Weaknesses
China is one of Uzbekistan's largest trading partners, with significant growth in bilateral trade.	Heavy reliance on Chinese capital and loans may lead to economic vulnerability.
Key projects like railways, roads, and energy pipelines have enhanced regional connectivity.	The risk of over-reliance on Chinese financing, leading to potential debt traps.
Increased Chinese investment in energy, manufacturing, and infrastructure modernizes Uzbekistan's economy.	While capital flows in, Uzbekistan may not gain full technological know-how from Chinese investments.
Strengthened Uzbekistan's diplomatic and strategic role in Central Asia, especially within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.	Increased alignment with China may strain relations with other regional powers like Russia or the West.
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
BRI offers opportunities for regional economic cooperation and improved trade routes between Central Asia, China, and beyond.	Rising influence of China may lead to tensions with Russia or the West, affecting Uzbekistan's foreign relations.
Investments in sectors such as renewable energy, high-tech industries, and manufacturing offer long-term development opportunities.	Infrastructure projects could lead to environmental degradation or social inequality if not carefully managed.
Improved infrastructure may increase Chinese tourism to Uzbekistan and boost cultural exchange.	Growing debt to China may lead to political leverage, reducing Uzbekistan's autonomy in foreign policy.
Collaboration on high-tech projects could foster technological innovation and modernization within Uzbekistan.	Economic downturns or fluctuations in global trade could affect the sustainability of China-Uzbekistan economic ties.

However, Uzbekistan has taken steps to manage this risk by diversifying its sources of finance and ensuring that projects funded by China align with the country's long-term economic priorities. Furthermore, it has strengthened ties with the European Union, which provided an \$83.6 million loan for photovoltaic projects. Additionally, Uzbekistan is pursuing WTO accession and green energy initiatives to reduce overreliance on Chinese funding. However, delays in significant China-backed projects, such as the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway, highlight the challenges of aligning infrastructure development with long-term national priorities[6].

increasingly become involved in Uzbekistan's industrial sector, helping to modernize production processes and improve the country's competitiveness. As evidence, Deputy General Director of Qomolangma Energy International Group Central Asia, Li Feng focused on the company's energy projects. "Our Tashkent office oversees projects worth over \$7bn, focusing on critical areas such as power lines, renewable energy, and infrastructure," Li said. He emphasized the company's commitment to sustainable development, adding, "We believe that energy infrastructure is key to Uzbekistan's future growth, and we are here to ensure a reliable energy network across Central Asia[4]". The Chinese government has also supported Uzbekistan's efforts to attract more foreign investment through financial aid and concessional loans under the BRI framework.

China's growing economic influence in Uzbekistan has translated into deeper political and diplomatic relations. Uzbekistan has welcomed China's active role in regional affairs, particularly in the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), where both countries are key members, while former Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Saidmukhtar Saidkasimov highlighted China's crucial role as a founding member of the SCO, emphasizing its significant contributions to the organization's formation, development, and the expansion of economic and trade cooperation among member states[5]. Uzbekistan has aligned itself with China on various regional security and economic issues, strengthening its position as a central player in Central Asia's broader regional integration efforts.

**Discussion.** Uzbekistan's deepening relationship with China under the Belt and Road Initiative marks a significant shift in the region's geopolitical dynamics. Historically, Central Asia has been under Russia's sphere of influence, with strong political, economic, and cultural ties between Uzbekistan and Moscow. However, China's growing economic presence in Uzbekistan challenges this traditional balance of power. Uzbekistan's foreign policy has evolved in response to China's economic opportunities, which offer the promise of modernizing infrastructure, diversifying trade partners, and securing financing for long-term development projects.

China's investments in Uzbekistan have bolstered economic growth, but they have also raised concerns about dependency on China. Critics argue that heavy reliance on Chinese loans for infrastructure development could lead to debt traps, as seen in other BRI partner countries. Using a SWOT analysis, the study identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats associated with this growing relationship.

Uzbekistan's role in the BRI has helped position it as a key player in Central Asia's economic integration. By improving regional infrastructure connectivity, China's projects in Uzbekistan are contributing to the broader goal of regional economic cooperation, particularly with neighboring Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. The development of transport corridors and energy pipelines helps facilitate trade between Central Asia, China, and the broader Eurasian market.

However, Uzbekistan must balance its growing ties with China against the interests of other regional powers, including Russia and the United States. As Uzbekistan navigates this complex geopolitical landscape, its strategic alignment with China

offers both opportunities and challenges, particularly in managing external pressures from rival powers.

Looking forward, the China-Uzbekistan partnership is likely to continue expanding, with further investments in technology, energy, and agriculture. In 2024, the two nations elevated their relationship to an all-weather comprehensive strategic partnership, underscoring their commitment to deepening cooperation across various sectors[7]. In December Uzbekistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Bakhtiyor Saidov, held a meeting with China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wang Yi. The minister announced this on his official page as follows: "As part of implementing the agreements reached between the leaders of Uzbekistan and China, today, together with my colleague, we signed an agreement allowing our citizens to travel visa-free for 30 days. This is another step towards fostering stronger exchanges, enhancing trade, and promoting international friendship"[8]. This agreement aims to strengthen cooperation

between the two countries. However, Uzbekistan must also work to diversify its sources of economic support and engage in multilateral regional initiatives to avoid over-dependence on any one country. Future research could explore the long-term economic impacts of China's investments on Uzbekistan's domestic industries and its evolving foreign policy.

**Conclusion.** China's growing influence in Uzbekistan and Central Asia is reshaping the region's economic and geopolitical landscape. Through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, China has become a key partner in Uzbekistan's efforts to modernize its infrastructure, diversify its economy, and enhance regional integration. While the economic benefits are evident, challenges remain, particularly in managing the risks associated with China's financial influence. As Uzbekistan continues to navigate its role in this shifting geopolitical environment, it will need to balance its strategic interests with the opportunities and challenges presented by China's rise.

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