

## **ABSTRACT**

**Dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

**Specialty: 6D020200 – International Relations**

**Liu Qi**

**Topic: «China's policy in the energy projects of the «Silk Road»: Kazakh and Turkmen vectors (comparative context)»**

### **General Characteristics of the Dissertation Research.**

The dissertation explores China's policy in the energy projects of the «Silk Road» and its relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The study provides a comparative analysis of energy issues in Central Asia (CA) and bilateral relations with China. It examines theoretical opportunities and practical prospects for establishing a balanced and conflict-free energy policy across the Eurasian region.

### **Relevance of the Research Topic.**

Central Asia is becoming increasingly significant for the People's Republic of China (PRC) in both geo-economic and strategic terms. Simultaneously, China plays a critical role as a key trade partner and investor for the Central Asian states, with its influence growing steadily. The stable development of political and trade-economic cooperation between China and the Central Asian countries, along with accumulated experience in interregional interaction, underscores the broad relevance of the dissertation topic.

The relevance of the study is linked to China's rapid rise on the international stage. As the world's second-largest economy, China has become an integral part of the global energy market, with its international presence being widely acknowledged. This highlights the significance of the Chinese factor in Central Asia. China's interests span vast geographic regions and almost all spheres of human activity, with the energy sector being a crucial factor in China's societal growth. Furthermore, China's trade-economic and transport-logistics interests are predominantly focused on the Eurasian region, particularly Central Asia.

The topic's relevance is also driven by the insufficient study of China's foreign policy strategy in relation to the leading energy-resource countries of Central Asia—Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Existing research does not adequately reflect the role and importance of these countries within the structural initiatives of the «One Belt, One Road» (BRI) framework. Analyzing Central Asia's cooperation with China in a comparative context and identifying future development prospects emphasizes the need for an in-depth exploration of the energy factor.

The international-political relevance of the topic is also tied to emerging signs of intense competition among global powers whose economies rely on energy resources and increasing consumption, leading to heightened global conflict potential.

### **Object of the Dissertation Research.**

The object of the research is China's policy in its relations with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in the energy sphere and within the emerging architecture of the new «Silk Road».

### **Subject of the Study.**

The subject of the study is the complex of bilateral and multilateral relations between China and the Central Asian states within the framework of the «Silk Road Economic Belt» projects.

### **Purpose of the Dissertation Research.**

The purpose, derived from the relevance of the topic, is to conduct a comparative study of China's energy policy along the new «Silk Road» within BRI and its project-based cooperation with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, aimed at achieving regional resource sustainability.

#### **To achieve this purpose, the following objectives are set:**

- To define theoretical-conceptual and methodological approaches for studying the Chinese factor in Central Asia's energy issues, using Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan as examples.
- To examine trends in the development of bilateral relations with China and explore structural dependencies in Central Asia's energy sector.
- To systematize the regulatory and political frameworks of strategic partnerships between China and the Republics of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, focusing on priority areas in the energy sector.
- To analyze key aspects of China's energy diplomacy using the concept of «peripheral diplomacy».
- To assess the significance of the new «Silk Road» initiative in the context of Kazakhstan's and Turkmenistan's energy projects within the «Silk Road Economic Belt» and BRI frameworks.
- To describe the pipeline policies of the three countries through comparative analysis.
- To conduct a SWOT analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and risks in bilateral and multilateral relations, such as those under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the «China–Central Asia» Dialogue.
- To propose recommendations for enhancing energy cooperation between China, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and to forecast future cooperation prospects.

### **Chronological Scope of the Study.**

The research covers the period starting from the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, marking the independence of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. This period also marks the beginning of energy relations between China, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. References to specific historical events are included to provide a comprehensive and persuasive analysis of the energy interests of the actors under consideration.

### **Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of the Dissertation.**

This study applies various aspects of geopolitical theories, particularly those addressing the influence of geographic terrain on the «fate of the state» in a broad sense and the dynamics of regional proximity among actors with overlapping or similar energy interests in a narrower context (Mahan, Mackinder). In contemporary conditions, a new paradigm of territorial development has emerged, driven by technological and informational advancements and the competition for natural resources («resource expansion»). The theoretical framework of political realism

(Morgenthau), systemic approaches to the study of the energy factor in global politics (Morton Kaplan), and the structural realism of Kenneth Waltz, among others, form the methodological basis for the systemic analysis and explanation of national strategies aimed at ensuring energy security.

The study incorporates a neoliberal Western perspective from prominent political scientists and strategists in global and regional politics, particularly regarding China's position and role, as well as that of Central Asia, along the New Silk Road. These include works by H. Kissinger, Zb. Brzezinski, M. Swaine, A. Tellis, and Frederick Starr, among others.

The research also considers the applicability of Chinese methodologies in the fields of international politics and global energy, characterized by their specificity and practical orientation.

To address the research objectives, a combination of general scientific and specialized methods suitable for analyzing international relations was employed. Comparative and statistical analyses, as well as methods of synthesis, deduction, induction, analogy, generalization, and description, facilitated the cognitive process from general to specific, enabling an assessment of the energy component's influence on global politics. Historical methods and chronology allowed for an exploration of the evolution of political and economic processes in Central Asian countries and newly independent states of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) that possess rich natural resources.

In addition to descriptive methods, the case study approach was utilized to address specific tasks. The data obtained formed the basis for a SWOT analysis, providing a comprehensive examination of factors influencing energy strategies. The method of generalization helped identify common characteristics and attributes of key international, regional processes and China's energy (hydrocarbon) policies in Central Asia. Traditional methods of description and qualitative evaluation were used to study China's relationships with Central Asian countries, focusing on interactions among energy actors.

### **Scientific Novelty of the Research.**

The study presents a novel formulation of research problems and objectives concerning the international and bilateral aspects of China's energy policy in collaboration with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from a comparative perspective. The following results reflect significant innovation and relevance within Chinese and Kazakhstani academic and practical contexts:

- Identification of strategic cooperation lines and the influence of a competitive environment on the mechanisms for realizing China's, Kazakhstan's, and Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon interests in Central Asia.
- Articulation of China's contemporary foreign policy goals and interests in its Central Asian policy.
- Analysis of the degree of convergence and divergence in China's international energy interests in Central Asia within a comparative context, along with the institutional mechanisms for managing emerging contradictions.

- Definition of the scope and characteristics of the Central Asian political-energy «competitive field» in the hydrocarbon sector, as well as China's intricate interactions within this field.

- Identification of a complex array of political, international, and regional processes (constructive and negative) in the trilateral dialogue format «China–Kazakhstan–Turkmenistan» in various configurations.

- Analysis of trends in multilateral diplomacy from a geopolitical perspective and prospects for formats such as «One Belt, One Road» (BRI), «Silk Road Economic Belt», China–Central Asia, the Caspian format, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as part of bilateral «strategic» relationships between China and Central Asian states in the 21st century.

### **Theoretical and Practical Significance of the Research.**

The findings of the dissertation can be utilized for further in-depth study of the relationships between China and Central Asian countries at an interdisciplinary level, providing an objective understanding of bilateral relations and analyzing the current state of strategic cooperation between China and Central Asia.

### **Key Provisions for Defense:**

1. The international-political transformation of the modern world exerts external influence on Central Asian countries, their relations with neighboring states such as China and Russia, and the activities of transnational energy companies. At the new stage of China's «rise,» a tendency toward its dominance in the transportation, energy, and resource sectors is evident, with the practical implementation of the New Silk Road (NSR) concept in Central Asia as part of the Eurasian core.

2. China's geopolitical energy strategy focuses on transitioning from developing to highly developed countries, rooted in its international «going global» strategy and its ambition to become a «great power» as per its official 2021–2049 doctrine.

3. China maintains stable economic and political strategic relations with all Central Asian states, effectively implementing investment, energy, and transportation projects in bilateral formats. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, rich in resources, demonstrate significant prospects for enhanced political convergence with China in the energy sector.

4. China's establishment of a new economic order is embedded in the goals of the «Belt and Road» initiative, which seeks to integrate Central Asian countries through transport-energy projects while respecting their sovereignty and national development. Central Asian states view China's presence as an opportunity for external investment in energy projects.

5. China's «peripheral diplomacy» emphasizes the long-term prospects of existing and new BRI energy projects, adhering to principles of good-neighborliness, «three-dimensional, multi-level cooperation beyond time and space» (Xi Jinping), free from political pressure and based on mutually beneficial agreements.

6. China establishes unique relationships with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, facilitating regional energy cooperation formats and pragmatic solutions for multilateral energy collaboration, such as «China–Central Asia» (+West Asia) the

Caspian format, the SCO, and the «Green» format. The development of upstream and downstream chains, as outlined in contractual documents, indicates that Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan could achieve significant advancements in their development.

### **Approbation and Publications**

The research results were tested during academic internships at the R.B. Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan; an internship as a consultant at the Chinese oil company Tian Shan Oil Service LLP; and teaching practice at Al-Farabi Kazakh National University. The author has published 11 articles, including one indexed in Scopus, four in journals recommended by the Science and Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and six in scientific journals and international conference proceedings.

The structure of the dissertation is determined by the research logic and consists of a list of abbreviations and acronyms, an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and a list of references. The main text includes tables, figures, and appendices.