

Japan's Multilateral Approach toward Central Asia

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Introduction

While keeping its position as top donor for the economic development of Central Asian countries, Japan's lack of strategy toward Central Asia has been pointed out.¹ On the other hand, Japan has attempted several times to work over and formulate big policy pictures for engagement in the region, not only in the field of economic assistance, but also in the sphere of diplomatic strategy.

In this article, I do not argue *the necessity* of strategy for Japan. Neither do I consider directly *why* Japan has to be engaged in the region. However, I describe *through what process* the policy-oriented concept on Central Asia has been established within Japan. Through an analysis of

¹ Michael Robert Hickok, "The Other End of the Silk Road: Japan's Eurasian Initiative," *Central Asian Survey* 19, no. 1 (2000): 17–39; Esen Usabaliev, "Politika Iaponii v stranakh Tsentral'noi Azii v kontekste vosmozhnogo poiavleniia novogo tsentra sily," *Tsentral'naia Aziia i Kavkaz* 17, no. 5 (2001): 159–165; Adel' Erkinovich Abishev, "Politika i interesy Iaponii," in *Politika i interesy mirovykh derzhav v Kazakhstane*, ed. Bulat Klychaevich Sultanov (Almaty: Daik-Press, 2002), 175–186; UYAMA Tomohiko, "Japanese Policies in Relation to Kazakhstan: Is There a 'Strategy'?" in *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus*, ed. Robert Legvold (Cambridge, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences / MIT Press, 2003), 165–186; Christopher Len, "Japan's Central Asian Diplomacy: Motivations, Implications and Prospects for the Region," *The China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 3, no. 3 (2005): 127–149; Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia's Second Chance* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), 79–80.

the process, I will show the tendency of Japan's approach to Central Asia: multilateralism. In this context, two major policies receive particular attention: Eurasian diplomacy² in 1997 and the Central Asia plus Japan dialogue (CAJ dialogue) since 2004. Concepts of Eurasian diplomacy and the CAJ dialogue are rare examples for understanding geopolitics that have long been forgotten in Japanese diplomacy. I position both policies as a direction of Japanese foreign policy since the 1990s, from which time Japan has pursued a multilateral approach in the Asia-Pacific region.

Of course, it may be argued that these concepts are spur-of-the-moment ideas by politicians with an ambiguous understanding of geopolitics and not worthy of examination. However, I would like to find meaning in a situation where, when Japan faced the serious problem of coping with international affairs after the collapse of the bipolar camps during the Cold War, many governmental staff and statesmen in Japan asserted the importance of Eurasia as a region of political and cultural diversity. Hereafter, I will outline the concept of multilateralism for Japanese foreign policy, which is related closely to its attitude toward Central Asia.

Regional Multilateralism in Japanese Diplomacy

Multilateralism, according to John G. Ruggie, is an institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct. As examples, he adapts the most-favored-nation (MFN) treatment and the collective security regime. He also extracts two corollaries for the definition: indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity. The former is a logical condition for the generalized organizing principles that cannot indiscriminately divide members of a collectivity with respect to the range of behaviors in question.³ Both of these corollaries were expanded after the end of the Cold War, because conditions that encourage cooperative relations among states had emerged with the end of ideological confrontation and with globalization.⁴

² "Address by Prime Minister HASHIMOTO Ryutaro to the Japan Association of Corporate Executives, 24 July 1997," <http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/0731douyukai.html>.

³ John G. Ruggie, ed., *Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 10–14.

⁴ KATO Akira, "Anzenhosho ni okeru takokukan-kyochoshugi" [Multilateralism in

To evaluate Japan's diplomacy after the Cold War, much has been written about Japanese-style multilateralism not only at the global level (like the United Nations and G8) but also at the regional level.⁵ As specified in the first Diplomatic Blue Book published in 1957, soon after entering the United Nations, Japan set forth its three diplomatic pillars to which it still adheres: a UN-centered diplomacy, cooperation with the free (democratic) world, and membership in the Asian community. These principles are all related to the ideals of Japanese diplomacy on multilateralism at both the global and regional level.

Discussions on Japan's regional multilateralism may be reasonably classified into the following two main topics, to which Japan's policy toward Central Asia is also linked. As Soeya Yoshihide, a professor at Keio University, observed,⁶ Japanese diplomacy after World War II was established by the "middle-way" alternative of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1946–1947, 1948–1954), in which Japan entered into an alliance with the United States while maintaining a national constitution that does not recognize the right of belligerency. However, the "Yoshida Doctrine" sometimes restricted Japanese diplomacy, with criticism from both the left and the right within Japan. It also cleaved national identity in a diplomatic sense, such as should Japan be a peaceful country or a major power in world politics? It is interesting that, in this context, Soeya proposes a "middle-power diplomacy" that stresses conflict prevention and multilateral cooperation abroad, while reserving the right of full-scale confrontation with major powers.

Moreover, discussions on Japanese multilateralism are linked with the emerging tendencies of regionalism in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan has not committed any acts of coercive intervention⁷ against its neighboring countries in a strategic sense; it has mainly concentrated its

Security], *Kokusai mondai*, no. 470 (1999): 29–44.

⁵ FUKUSHIMA Akiko, *Japanese Foreign Policy: The Emerging Logic of Multilateralism* (London: Macmillan, 1999).

⁶ SOEYA Yoshihide, *Nihon no "Midoru-pawa" gaiko: sengo nihon no sentaku to koso* [Japan's "Middle Power" Diplomacy: Japan's Alternatives and Initiatives after World War II] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2005).

⁷ In this article, intervention is defined, quoting from Joseph S. Nye's work, as "external actions that influence the domestic affairs of another sovereign state." It includes not only highly coercive action such as military invasion, but also less coercive action such as speeches or broadcasts. See Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History*, 4th ed. (New York: Longman, 2003), 154–155.

interests on economic affairs while being protected by the security umbrella of the United States. The end of the Cold War, however, encouraged a rebirth of “Japan’s Asian policy” with a change in the international environment during the 1990s. It was a critical period for Japanese foreign policy, seeking a new way to survive in the post-Cold War world where so-called bilateral stability no longer existed. Since the end of 1996, Japan had set its field for dialogue on security issues with almost all of its neighboring countries.⁸ This period overlapped with the era of Hashimoto Ryutaro as prime minister (January 1996 to July 1998).

In this sense, Japan’s policy toward its neighboring countries in the 1990s was characterized by a tendency towards multilateralism that sought frameworks for dialogue including on security issues. This enthusiasm for multilateral security dialogues in the Asia-Pacific region was a result of changing perceptions about bilateral relationships between each country in this region and the United States. Regional-level and global-level multilateralism exist in parallel such as the United Nations, while most countries allied with the United States in Asia understand the importance of bilateralism; their hub-and-spoke relations are with the United States.⁹

First Bilateral Approach to Central Asia

Although enthusiasm for a more multilateral approach at the regional level has grown, Japan had no clear multilateral concept when it started to construct relationships with the Central Asian states after the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Japan instead has stressed bilateral approaches to creating relations with them, especially with Uzbekistan. According to Magosaki Ukeru, the first Japanese ambassador to Uzbekistan, the first step toward enlarging Japan’s presence in Central Asia was the visit of a

⁸ INOBUCHI Takashi, ed., *Japan’s Asian Policy: Revival and Response* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 8–15.

⁹ HOSHINO Toshiya, “Nihon no takokukan gaikou” [Japan’s Multilateral Diplomacy], in *Nihon no Higashi Ajia koso* [Japan’s Initiative toward East Asia], ed. SOEYA Yoshihide and TADOKORO Masayuki, *Gendai Higashi Ajia to Nihon*, 1 (Tokyo: Keio Gijuku Daigaku shuppankai, 2004), 247–270.

¹⁰ Japan recognized Central Asian countries as soon as they declared their independence in December 1991, and established diplomatic relationships with them in January 1992. Japanese embassies in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were opened in January 1993.

delegation headed by Chino Tadao, former Vice Minister of Financing and International Affairs of the Ministry of Finance (MOF), in February 1992, and the first visit of Uzbek president Islam Karimov to Japan in May 1992. These visits reflected Japanese support for Uzbekistan; when Uzbekistan got into difficulties by its strict macro-economic policy introduced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Japan started administering grants to Uzbekistan and for other development assistance.¹¹

So far, there is no clear evidence whether these episodes reflected a concrete strategy of Japan toward Central Asia. Uyama Tomohiko picks up a feature of Japan's Central Asian policy as "its dependence on chance and personal influence."¹² This generalization may fit even Chino's activities within the region. On the other hand, Magosaki suggested that the decision of the Japanese government was political in nature, and beyond "a simple emotionally loaded argument." He commented that he could not imagine that the MOF had decided on such assistance only by the request of an ambassador.¹³

Obviously, Uzbekistan welcomed the Japanese approach. The first Japanese approach to Uzbekistan has contributed to sustaining stable relations between the two countries, while Uzbekistan has continued its pragmatic balancing and bargaining policy toward Russia and the United States. Japan's policy toward not only Uzbekistan but also the rest of Central Asia started with its assistance, which now exceeds that from European countries and the United States. In this sense, Japan and the Central Asian states reached a peak regarding mutual understanding and cooperation in a bilateral framework.

Prologue to Multilateralism: The Obuchi Mission and Eurasian Diplomacy

The relationship between Japan and Central Asian countries developed so steadily that it led to a major foreign policy tendency during the summer of 1997, which eventually became the Mission for Dialogue with Russia and Central Asia headed by a leading member of the Japanese Diet,

¹¹ MAGOSAKI Ukeru, "Uzbekisutan: Waga gaiko kotohajime" [Uzbekistan: How I began my work there as a diplomat], *Chuo koron*, February 1996, 40–51.

¹² Uyama, "Japanese Policies in Relation to Kazakhstan," 168.

¹³ Magosaki, "Uzbekisutan: Waga gaiko kotohajime," 48.

Obuchi Keizo (hereafter the “Obuchi Mission”), and the “Eurasian diplomacy” speech by Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro.

The Obuchi Mission traveled to Russia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan from June 28 to July 9, 1997. Its main goals were to discuss with their Russian counterparts in Russia “the development of Japanese-Russian relations, especially in the framework of the Asia-Pacific perspective” and to visit the four Central Asian countries to discuss with leading figures the development of relations between Japan and these countries, seeking a future of cooperative relations.¹⁴ It was a huge delegation with 61 members in all including diet members, leaders of the business community, and scholars and experts on Central Asia.

In the final report of the mission, Obuchi offered several suggestions of which many were eventually realized. As far as relations with Russia are concerned, three issues have come to the fore. First, the final report suggested holding a summit meeting between Japan and Russia as a follow-up to the latest bilateral meeting between Japanese prime minister Hashimoto and Russian president Boris Yeltsin at a G8 summit in Denver, June 1997. As the report suggested, bilateral relations between Japan and Russia developed through the so-called “Krasnoiarisk Process.” Second, related to this momentum, Obuchi’s report proposed that Japan support Russia’s joining the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Japan officially supported Russia’s entry into APEC at the Krasnoiarisk summit meeting (November 1–2, 1997) and Russia joined the ministerial and summit meeting of APEC in Vancouver, November 21–25, 1997.¹⁵ Third, the bilateral consultative framework proposed by Yeltsin during the visit of the Obuchi Mission, called “the 21st Century Committee,” was revealed as the “Japan-Russia 21st Century Committee,” co-chaired by Sakurauchi Yoshio, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Japanese Diet, and Yuri M. Luzhkov, mayor of Moscow.¹⁶

¹⁴ Zaidan Hojin Kokusai Koryu Senta [Japan Center for International Exchange], ed., *Roshia Chuo Ajia taiwa misshon hokoku: Yurasia gaiko he no joshō* [Report of the Mission for Dialogue with Russia and Central Asia: Introduction toward Eurasian Diplomacy] (Tokyo: Roshia Chuo Ajia taiwa misshon, 1998), 7.

¹⁵ As for evidence of Japan’s influence regarding this issue, see SATO Kazuo and KOMAKI Akiyoshi, *Kensho Nichi-Ro shunou kosho: Reisen-go no mosaku* [Inspecting Summit Meeting between Japan and Russia] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2003), 129–132.

¹⁶ According to the final report, Yeltsin proposed that Obuchi become a chairman of the

Obviously, Japan has held fast to its policy of maintaining economic support of Central Asian countries as Obuchi's report also stressed. Moreover, according to the proposals in Obuchi's report, a direct airline between Japan and Uzbekistan was realized in 2003. The report also suggested establishing a parliament members' assembly with Central Asian counterparts and a think-tank for Central Asian regional studies in Tokyo. As an aside, the report encouraged Japanese establishments, especially the prime minister, to visit Central Asia. Although ministers such as Foreign Minister Watanabe Michio have traveled to Central Asia, the former prime minister of Japan had, up to that point, not visited the region in long time. However, from August 28 to 30, 2006, Koizumi Junichiro at last made his first official visit as the Japanese prime minister to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan during the final days of his tenure as prime minister.

It is probably correct to assume in part that Hashimoto's "Eurasian diplomacy" speech is an argument based on the results of the Obuchi Mission. The positive stance towards Russia suggested by Obuchi's report remained in Hashimoto's speech. However, it was an argument from not only a Central Asian perspective, but also included the perspectives of Russia, China, and the Caucasus. The "Eurasian diplomacy" concept, therefore, became a guideline with a wider geographic range, which was an exceptional case for Japanese foreign policy after World War II.

Hashimoto argued the necessity of forging "a perspective of Eurasian diplomacy viewed from the 'Pacific,'" while he understood that enlargement of NATO to the east in the mid-1990s was "Eurasian diplomacy viewed from the Atlantic." The main goal of his speech was to express the standpoint of Japanese diplomacy toward Russia, China, and "the Silk Road region" encompassing the Central Asian and the Caucasus republics in the former Soviet Union.

Although Hashimoto's thesis pointed to a new direction of Japanese diplomacy, he confirmed the traditional basic policy of Japan: the maintenance of the Japan-US security regime and the creation of frameworks in this region through, for example, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and APEC. In this sense, Eurasian diplomacy was also an extrapolative concept for the traditional foreign policy of Japan after World War II. While continuing bilateral relations with the US under the

framework of the Japan-US alliance, it sought the possibility of constructing a more multilateral approach toward the Eurasian continent.

In his speech, Hashimoto talked about policy toward Russia stressing three principles: trust, mutual benefit, and a long-term perspective. These principles were connected with the results of the Hashimoto and Yeltsin meeting in Krasnoiarsk, which included the statement, “[B]ased on the Tokyo declaration [Japan and Russia] are making their utmost efforts to conclude a peace treaty by the year of 2000.” As Hiroshi Kimura suggested, Hashimoto’s speech on Eurasian diplomacy was “an epoch-making speech considering the necessity of turning a zero-sum to a non-zero-sum game.”¹⁷

Regarding relations with Central Asian countries, on the other hand, Hashimoto argues:

Japan has already used Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other means to help the development of the New Independent States of Central Asia, and has sought to enhance its bilateral relations with these countries. In the future, Japan’s foreign policy toward this region will be crafted as *an organic component of the broad scheme of relations with Eurasia*. In this process, I believe there is a need to develop even more elaborated foreign policies than in the past. (emphasis mine)

After making this argument, Hashimoto pointed out three directions for cooperation: (1) political dialogue aiming to enhance trust and mutual understanding; (2) economic cooperation as well as cooperation for natural resource development aiming to foster prosperity; and (3) cooperation to build peace through nuclear non-proliferation, democratization and the fostering of stability. Compared with the wording in the proposal of Obuchi’s report, these directions can be attributed to Obuchi’s recommendations.

Japan received favorable reactions to the speech from the Russian side. Compared with the policy-oriented argument in the US at that time,

¹⁷ KIMURA Hiroshi, *Toi ringoku: Roshia to Nihon* [Distant Neighbors: Russia and Japan] (Kyoto: Sekai Shiso Sha, 2002), 698–702. In his previous work published on the same topic in English, *Japanese-Russian Relations under Gorbachev and Yeltsin*, Distant Neighbors, 2 (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000), Kimura did not assess clearly that Hashimoto’s speech was “epoch-making”; rather, he pointed to a distorted understanding of Russians in interpreting the speech “in a way that was convenient for Russia.”

such as Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard*, which considered how the US could control Eurasia, the Japanese idea was welcome to the Russians because it stressed "trust and mutual understanding."¹⁸ On the other side, however, the Japanese government was criticized for sending out the wrong signal to Russia. Russia was led to believe that Japan had changed its policy toward Russia to promote economic cooperation and a peace treaty by putting aside the territorial issue.¹⁹

At that time, Prime Minister Hashimoto seemed to enthusiastically promote a new foreign policy direction based on regional multilateralism. On January 14, 1997, he made a speech arguing for the development of stable Japanese relations with ASEAN,²⁰ and that Japan had made a start in establishing and institutionalizing the framework of ASEAN plus three (China, Japan, and South Korea) from November 1997. A month after the Eurasian diplomacy speech, Hashimoto made another speech enlarging his view regarding relations with China.²¹ These consecutive proposals for new directions of Japanese foreign policy toward Asian and Eurasian countries may have depended on the personality and political ambition of Hashimoto himself.²² Furthermore, they were an expression of the

¹⁸ As examples of Russian reactions, see Anatolii Shmyrev, "Tri tokiiskikh printsipa: moskove ne meshaet sdelat' shag navstrechu Iaponii," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, July 30, 1997; Vsevolod Ovchinnikov, "Chto sluchit Moskve 'doktorina Khashimoto,'" *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, August 13, 1997.

¹⁹ See, for example, HAKAMADA Shigeki, "'Sogo genso' wo haishita Nichi-Ro kankei no kochiku wo" [Constructing Relations between Japan and Russia without "Mutual Illusion"], *Foresight* 9, no. 4 (1998): 10–13.

²⁰ Journalists called the speech "the Hashimoto doctrine." The text of the speech can be viewed at <http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/hasimotosouri/speech/1997/0114ase-seisaku.html>.

²¹ "Seeking a New Foreign Policy toward China" (Speech by Prime Minister HASHIMOTO Ryutaro to the Yomiuri International Economic Society, August 28, 1997). An English version is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/china/seeking.html>.

²² Hashimoto displayed leadership in constructing Eurasian diplomacy, commenting in a later interview that "the concept was in my mind even in the past," and "it would be rather led by the prime minister's side." See HASHIMOTO Ryutaro, "Nihon gaiko intabyu shirizu (4): HASHIMOTO Ryutaro (kohen); Nodo-teki gaiko wo mezashite" [Interview Series on Japanese Foreign Policy (4), HASHIMOTO Ryutaro (the latter part), Searching for Active Diplomacy], by IOKIBE Makoto, in *Kokusai mondai*, no. 505 (2002): 80–103. About the policy-making process of Eurasian diplomacy, see also TAMBA Minoru, *Nichiro Gaiko hiwa* [The Secret Story of Japanese-Russian Diplomacy] (Tokyo: Chuo Koron Shinsha, 2004), 16; NISHIMURA Yoichi, "'Yurashia gaiko' no butai ura" [Backstage of Eurasian Diplomacy], *Sekai*, January 1998, 138–147; SATO and KOMAKI, *Kensho Nichi-Ro shunou kosho: Reisen-go no mosaku*, 93–96.

motivation within and around the Japanese government to propose an original foreign policy that could be adapted to drastically changing world politics such as NATO enlargement or Russo-Chinese rapprochement. These directions share an understanding of constructing a new strategy of foreign policy in the post-Cold War world. Akino Yutaka, then an associate professor at Tsukuba University and a member of the Obuchi Mission, oriented the desirable Japanese strategy that “while developing Silk Road diplomacy toward Central Asia as the new heartland, Japan should try to achieve a breakthrough in relations with Russia in the game of the new international system in Eurasia by the US, China, India, and the EU.”²³

On the other side, however, there was a weak point in Eurasian diplomacy as a foreign policy concept seeking a multilateral approach. First, although it tried to grasp the whole region under the term of Eurasia, this multilateral approach narrowed toward the end with emphasis on sub-regional divisions such as its relations with Russia, China, and the “Silk Road countries.” In this sense, multilateralism in Eurasian diplomacy ended bilaterally after all. This might have been inevitable because Hashimoto’s Eurasian diplomacy focused mainly on making a breakthrough in Japanese-Russian relations, including the territorial issue. Regarding policy toward Central Asia, Eurasian diplomacy was a concept that was not sufficiently funded to realize the project, compared to when Japan took its first step in constructing relations with these countries.

Eurasian diplomacy was, after all, not an everlasting concept. Although it adapted positively during the Hashimoto administration and its successor, the Obuchi administration (from July 30, 1998 to April 5, 2000), the chance of presenting the concept as a specific direction of Japanese foreign policy decreased with time, while the Krasnoyarsk process failed to meet the deadline to conclude the bilateral peace treaty. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan has used the term “Silk Road diplomacy,” originally part of Eurasian diplomacy, as a substitute for the concept.²⁴

²³ AKINO Yutaka, “‘Shuyaku’ no za wo owareta Roshia ga Nihon he sekkin” [Russia, Ousted from the Role of Leading Actor, Makes an Approach to Japan], *Sekai shuho*, December 30, 1997, 6–9. In this article, Akino assessed the Krasnoyarsk process so optimistically that the “positive performance” to conclude a future peace treaty between Japan and Russia would end up becoming a reality.

²⁴ See, for example, *Gaiko Forum*, December 1998, a special issue on “Silk Road

Reconstructing Multilateralism: Central Asia plus Japan Dialogue

Japanese Policy toward Central Asia after 9/11

Although Eurasian diplomacy had diminished as a policy slogan, the importance of Central Asia has consolidated steadily in Japan, and its relationship with Central Asia is becoming closer. In 1993, the total bilateral ODA donated to the five Central Asian countries was \$2.57 million, eventually reaching \$24.227 million in 2003. By 2003, the accumulated bilateral ODA toward the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus reached \$1.98 billion.²⁵ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has constructed a new formation toward Central Asia; with the existing embassies in Tashkent and Almaty, it has also opened embassies in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan.²⁶ In 2004, the Ministry reshuffled its own department on Central Asia, and the Central Asia and Caucasus Division was established under the European Affairs Bureau in place of the New Independent States Assistance Division that concerned all CIS countries including Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova.²⁷ Japan also realized the importance of measures against terrorism in Central Asia as a priority for international security, especially after a group of Japanese geologists were taken hostage by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and US operations in Afghanistan and Central Asia after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. As a foreign minister in the Koizumi administration, Kawaguchi Yoriko argued in 2003 that “People’s understanding about international relations and security or, in other words, their threat perception, has changed drastically” after 9/11, and it has been strongly impressed on them that “even non-governmental actors like terrorists might be enemies jeopardizing national security.”²⁸ Japanese assistance in

Diplomacy.” The Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperated in editing the journal.

²⁵ Gaimusho, Keizai Kyoryokukyoku, ed., *Seifu kaihatsu enjo (ODA) kunibetsu deta bukku*, 2004 [Japan’s Official Development Assistance: Annual Report, 2004] (2005): 199–204.

²⁶ The Japanese Embassy in Kazakhstan changed its location from Almaty to Astana in 2005.

²⁷ After their reorganization, these three countries are covered by the Central and South Eastern Europe Division.

²⁸ KAWAGUCHI Yoriko, “Henka suru anzenhosho kankyo to Nihon gaiko” [The Changing Security Environment and Japanese Diplomacy], *Ronza*, March 2003, 181.

reconstructing post-Taliban Afghanistan can be interpreted as an effective measure of international cooperation against terrorism.²⁹

Policy-makers tried to gradually present opinions that linked terrorism with the situation in Central Asia. Here is an example written by Motegi Toshimitsu who served as the senior vice minister for Kawaguchi until October 2003. In his book published while in the Foreign Ministry, Motegi analyzed the contemporary regional situation classifying Asia into the three categories of Pacific Asia (or Oceanic Asia), Silk Road Asia (or South-West and Central Asia), and a non-geographic concept, Islamic Asia:

During the Cold War era, nobody paid attention to Central Asia strategically or politically. However, after the Cold War, it became a region where many problems such as narco-trafficking, refugees, and terrorism frequently occur, probably owing to freedom from the weight of the Soviet Union. Just as in the Middle East, Silk Road Asia is also a region with disturbing factors in international society.

Central Asian countries have taken on complicated aspects sandwiched among powers and influential regions such as China, India, and the Middle East . . . “Regional powers” such as Japan, China, and India are required to describe visions of how to stabilize the whole area, which include the issue of engagement toward Central Asia.³⁰

Furthermore, Motegi pointed out that Japan’s ODA will shift its target region from ASEAN countries that have already developed sufficiently to Silk Road Asia or Islamic Asia. Motegi also linked economic assistance to anti-terror measures, as Kawaguchi did.

Even official remarks released from the Japanese government suggest cooperation in security affairs including the anti-terror issue between Japan and Central Asian countries. On April 12, 2002, at the Boao Forum for Asia on Hainan Island, China, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro called for “a widened sphere of cooperation, including Central and West Asia.” He also stressed the creation of a “new momentum for cooperation in the five areas of energy, the environment, currency and finances, trade

²⁹ http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/afghanistan/f_shien.html (in Japanese).

³⁰ MOTEGI Toshimitsu, *Nihon gaiko no kosoryoku* [Japan’s Diplomatic Initiative] (Tokyo: Tokuma Shoten, 2003), 114–117.

and investment and development assistance.”³¹ Before this speech, on January 14 in Singapore, Koizumi proposed an “Initiative for Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Partnership” vowing to establish a free trade zone among them in the future.³² This was evaluated as the first step of the concept of an Asian community from Japan. In this speech, Koizumi also argued that security cooperation should be drastically intensified, including on transnational issues such as terrorism. His proposal in Boao was also presented in the same context based on a comprehensive approach to region-wide security in Asia.

On the basis of the statement in Boao, in July 2002, the Silk Road Energy Mission headed by Sugiura Seiken, Senior Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, dispatched to Central Asia the first comprehensive delegation since the Obuchi Mission. Immediately after the delegation’s visit, on July 29, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan visited Japan to conclude the bilateral statement on friendship, strategic partnership and cooperation, which suggested cooperation in the fields of politics and security, including anti-terrorism measures.³³

It is difficult to evaluate whether Koizumi’s diplomacy followed his predecessor’s policy faithfully, especially in terms of Japan’s relations with other Asian countries. However, as far as the multilateral approaches toward Asian and Eurasian countries are concerned, there has been a clear continuity since the mid-1990s. Japan has tried to cooperate multilaterally at least with ASEAN and Central Asian countries not only in economic terms but also in terms of politics and security.

Emerging Epistemic Community

The Central Asia plus Japan dialogue (CAJ dialogue), which kicked off in the summer of 2004, evolved from the Silk Road diplomacy. Although this process started with Foreign Minister Kawaguchi’s round visit among Central Asian countries from August 25–31, it is probably correct to suppose that the staff of the Foreign Ministry, especially the Division of

³¹ “Asia in a New Century: Change and Opportunity” (Speech by the prime minister of Japan, Koizumi Junichiro, at the Boao Forum for Asia, April 12, 2002), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/asia-paci/china/boao0204/speech.html>.

³² “Japan and ASEAN in East Asia: A Sincere and Open Partnership” (Speech by the prime minister of Japan, KOIZUMI Junichiro, Singapore, January 14, 2002), <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0201/speech.html>.

³³ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/uzbekistan/pv0207/joint.html>.

Central Asia and the Caucasus led by Michii Rokuichiro, had considered the new direction of Japan's policy toward Central Asia beforehand. We caught a glimpse of the internal dispute from Kawaguchi's comments at the National Diet. On February 5, 2004, during a discussion at a special committee of the House of Councilors, Kawaguchi evaluated her own actions toward Central Asia in that she had already set many meetings with her counterparts from Central Asia because of the importance of diplomacy vis-à-vis Central Asia. She also stressed Japan's role in Central Asia, while commenting, "I hear many voices (from Central Asia) greatly appreciating Japan's influence and contribution in the region," and listing rival regional frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO).³⁴

In this period, a group of experts worthy of the name "epistemic community" grew in Japan. They shared the necessity of creating a new framework for cooperation with the Central Asian states. Today, their influence is confirmed in several publications. For instance, the Japan Institute of International Affairs released a report, *Evolution of International Relations in Central Asia*, appending policy-oriented implications and ideas such as "Central Asia is a frontier for Japanese foreign policy where we can amplify the same principle of diplomacy toward Asian countries, or where Japan can enlarge its presence."³⁵

In a 2004 essay, Kimura Hiroshi also argued that Japan should take the initiative to create a beneficial international environment through engagement toward Central Asia. The title of the essay, "Central Asia and Japan: Importance as an Example," suggests the future policy's catchphrase of "Central Asia plus Japan." In this essay, he pointed out that there is no direct point of contact between Central Asian countries and Japan, but indirect contact through Russia. "Japan can be 'an example' not only to neighboring Russia by establishing friendly relations with Central Asian states," discusses Kimura, "but also to Central Asian nations in fields such as the economy, politics and diplomacy and security."³⁶

These discourses suggest Japanese scholars' tendency in

³⁴ Kawaguchi's comment to Takano Hiroshi, a member of the House of Councilors. On April 6, 2004, she made almost the same comment to Iwamoto Tsukasa at the Committee on Foreign and Defense Affairs, the House of Councilors.

³⁵ http://www.jiia.or.jp/pdf/russia_centre/h14_c-asia/03_kasai.pdf (in Japanese).

³⁶ KIMURA Hiroshi, "Chuo Ajia to Nihon" [Central Asia and Japan], *Ampoken Houkoku*, January 27, 2004.

understanding the necessity of strengthening relations with Central Asian states and of reconsidering principles; most of them seem to share a consensus of constructing a multilateral approach pursuing region-wide issues, while considering the importance of bilateral relations with each Central Asian state. These ideas were put together at a symposium hosted by the Central Asia and Caucasus Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on March 25, 2004. It is interesting that perspectives on multilateralism in Central Asia were proposed from the Japanese side in response to the idea presented by panelists from Central Asia. According to the transcript, Kadyrbek Sarbaev, Director General of the Asian Bureau of Kyrgyzstan, said that the contemporary presence of major powers in Central Asia has generally been described as “Central Asia plus three,” i.e., Russia, the United States and China. To strengthen the role of major powers in Central Asia, Sarbaev said, “It is important and necessary to point out the role of Japan in the process emerging in Central Asia today. I firmly believe that Japan is an active partner rather than an indirect partner for Central Asia. Considering that contemporary Central Asia is confronted with dual serious problems, i.e., security and economic development, Japan can contribute to the latter in particular, to improve the economic situation in Central Asian countries.”³⁷ As a response to Sarbaev’s remark, Tanaka Tetsuji, advisor to Kyrgyz president Askar Akaev, argued, “It is possible to imagine a pattern like Central Asia plus Japan as a regional integration (framework) in economics. Considering the economic influence of Korea or Turkey on Central Asia, I can also propose another framework like Central Asia plus one (i.e., Japan) and observers. Anyway, I think that we should encourage the construction of a common economic zone in Central Asia, while making use of a framework like ‘Central Asia plus alpha.’”³⁸

In addition to such discussions among experts, there is another condition for the construction of Japan’s new direction on its policy towards Central Asia, that is, the expansion and maturation of the range and scope of experts in Japan on Central Asia since the 1990s. Even

³⁷ Japan, Gaimusho, Chuo Ajia Kokasasu shitsu [Central Asia and the Caucasus Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs], ed., *Chuo Ajia sinpoziumu: Chuo Ajia ni okeru chiiki kyoryoku no genjo to mirai* [Symposium on Central Asia: Present and Future for Regional Cooperation in Central Asia] (2005), 13–16.

³⁸ Japan, Gaimusho, Chuo Ajia Kokasasu shitsu, *Chuo Ajia sinpozium*, 72.

within the Foreign Ministry, the staff, many having majored in the Russian, Turkish and Persian languages, is well informed about the region through on-the-job experience in the field. With this as a background, the CAJ dialogue has been indicated through a bottom-up policy-making process.

Starting the Dialogue and Its Problems

During Foreign Minister Kawaguchi's visit to Central Asia in the summer of 2004, she twice proposed the goals of the CAJ dialogue. In August 26, she gave a policy speech entitled "Adding a New Dimension: Central Asia plus Japan" at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent.³⁹ Based on the concept of "Eurasian diplomacy," she emphasized Japan's attitude toward Central Asia as follows:

It goes without saying that there are many changes we have no control over. The sweeping changes to international security as a result of 9/11 are only one example of this, and suddenly, Central Asia finds itself in the middle of a dramatically shifted regional strategic environment. I can tell you emphatically that Japan has no selfish objectives towards Central Asia. A country that does not engage in the use of force and a country with no political, territorial, or other potential sources of conflict with the countries of Central Asia, Japan is a natural partner for Central Asia, and the foundations have already been laid. In reflection of Central Asia's geopolitical importance, Japan has a major interest in securing peace and stability in this region, as it affects the peace and stability of the entire Eurasian continent.

With this understanding of the security environment in Central Asia, she pondered "what Japan can do to promote both stability and development in this region" and proposed three principles for Central Asia plus Japan: respecting diversity, competition and coordination, and open cooperation. Here, Kawaguchi stressed the importance of intra-regional cooperation: "By Central Asia taking on such an intra-regional framework, I believe that stability and prosperity can be attained much faster and more steadily than by each country acting only independently." She also suggested the future enlargement of the dialogue geographically toward Afghanistan. This subject was partly realized when the foreign minister of

³⁹ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/uzbekistan/speech0408.html>.

Afghanistan participated as a guest at the second ministerial meeting of the dialogue in June 2006.

After her policy speech in Tashkent, on August 28, the first ministerial meeting of the CAJ dialogue was held at Astana where all foreign ministers from Central Asia except Turkmenistan met together in a hall. It would have been a positive result had the ambassador of Turkmenistan to Kazakhstan represented his country, as it have been given impetus towards isolationism. Given its prior impetus towards isolationism, the representation of the Turkmenistan ambassador to Kazakhstan would be a positive result.

The joint statement also insists on Central Asia's "geopolitical importance," just as Eurasian diplomacy did. Moreover, the CAJ dialogue would be better than Eurasian diplomacy in respect of listing in the appendix of the statement examples of cooperation, issues and other matters to be addressed in each field such as counter-terrorism, drugs, transportation, water, etc.⁴⁰ These subjects were classified systematically at the first senior officials' meeting (SOM) in March 4, 2005. The dialogue will be pursued through the five pillars of (1) political dialogue, (2) intra-regional cooperation, (3) business promotion, (4) intellectual dialogue and (5) cultural and people-to-people exchange. While stressing the importance of intra-regional cooperation for realizing peace and stability and economic prosperity, SOM listed ten possible areas of intra-regional cooperation including counter-terrorism, drug trafficking, mining, the environment, water, energy, etc.⁴¹

The current foreign minister, Aso Taro, succeeded and developed these principles and pillars of the dialogue. For example, in his policy speech entitled "Central Asia as a Corridor of Peace and Stability" on June 1, 2006, he stressed the following guidelines governing Japan's diplomatic relations with Central Asia: (1) approaching the region from a broad-based perspective; (2) supporting "open regional cooperation"; and (3) seeking partnerships rooted in universal values (democracy, a market

⁴⁰ Joint Statement "Central Asia + Japan" Dialogue/Foreign Ministers' Meeting: Relations between Japan and Central Asia as They Enter a New Era, Astana, August 28, 2004; KOMATSU Ichiro, "'Chuo Ajia + Nihon': Tai Chuo Ajia seisaku no shin tenkai" ["Central Asia plus Japan": A New Policy Development toward Central Asia], *Gaiko Forum*, no. 197 (2004): 20-27.

⁴¹ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2005/3/0304-2.html>.

economy, the safeguarding of human rights, and the rule of law).⁴² In addition, the policy evolved in the sense that he puts forward “universal values” more strongly than did Kawaguchi in her speech in Tashkent two years ago in which she emphasized “the crucial nature of the development of human rights and democratization in Central Asia.” As a result of the second and latest ministerial meeting in June 5, 2006, member states released an action plan for the dialogue. These were concrete plans to develop each of the pillars mentioned above, especially that of intra-regional cooperation.⁴³

For the further development of the CAJ dialogue, there are several issues to resolve. The first is how to balance interests and preferences among member states. In general, all Central Asian states behave with regional cooperation at first sight. In detail, however, as the president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, suggested in his bilateral talks with Kawaguchi, the dialogue should be implemented while taking into consideration that each state in Central Asia has its own self-interest.⁴⁴

Second, the dialogue should maintain continuity. So far, the regular meetings at each level seem to be consolidated and mature; there have been two meetings both at the ministerial and the SOM level. In addition, the first “track two”-level meeting named “Tokyo dialogue” was held on March 30, 2006. Moreover, the participants of the second ministerial meeting suggested in the action plan exploring the possibility of holding a summit meeting in the future within the dialogue framework.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the dialogue should create a perspective on how to harmonize with other regional frameworks for international cooperation. Will the CAJ dialogue become competitive or cooperative with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Eurasian Economic Community?⁴⁵

⁴² <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/speech0606.html>.

⁴³ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/dialogue/action0606.html>.

⁴⁴ *Yomiuri Shimbun*, August 29, 2004.

⁴⁵ See, for example, as anxiety that the dialogue will become a challenging framework against the SCO, Konstantin O. Sarkisov, “Novaia bipoliarnaia konfrontatsiia,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, June 8, 2006. Another Russian expert evaluated Japan’s initiative positively: Aleksei Malashenko, “Tsentral’naia Aziia: nikto ne khotel pobezhdat’,” *NG-Dipkur’er*, January 16, 2006.

Conclusion

The process of creating Eurasian diplomacy and the CAJ dialogue has been an important movement in Japanese foreign policy, in which the challenge of including geopolitics-oriented ideas has been met. It is also represents a unique opportunity for Japan to search for a way for regional multilateralism because, as well as most Asian countries in alliance with the United States, Japan understands the importance of such bilateral, hub-and-spoke relations with the US, and depends on the security umbrella delivered by the US. Suffice it to say here that Japan has just started to learn how to establish its regional multilateralism, although the process may be naïve. In this sense, Japan's multilateral approaches during the Hashimoto administration should be verified in detail as a crucial diplomatic episode. As mentioned earlier, he had tried to promote a new foreign policy direction based on regional multilateralism not only toward the Eurasian continent but also toward the Asia-Pacific region, including ASEAN countries.

When Eurasian diplomacy and the CAJ dialogue are evaluated separately, the former was an initiative constructed by a top-down policy-making process, while the latter has been constructed by a relatively bottom-up process. However, both processes have not yet matured, as Ruggie defines multilateralism with the dual corollaries of indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity. For example, to establish indivisibility in Japan's multilateral approach to Central Asian states, all participants in the framework should share the norm for regional stability. Because of the geographical remoteness of this region, however, there was a lack of urgency in Japan to face threats against regional stability.

The framework of the dialogue has just been set up through the multilateral approach toward Central Asia, and it is too early to forecast whether the process will create substantial products for regional cooperation. In the post-World War II era, as mentioned above, Japan's foreign policy toward neighboring countries was based on bilateral relations, and it was difficult for Japan to switch to multilateral relations mainly based on comprehensive regional considerations. This was a factor that doomed Hashimoto's initiative in addressing issues relating to Eurasia from a broad point of view. As far as the contemporary CAJ dialogue process is concerned, in order to overcome obstacles among

member states such as geographical remoteness, it is a critical subject for Japan whether substantial actions will work effectively during the process, for instance, in the area of measures against terrorism and drug trafficking, which are listed in the latest action plan of the CAJ dialogue.