



CAUSES AND DETERMINANTS OF THE DIRECTION OF CHINESE MIGRATION TO CENTRAL ASIA

Orasta Ziyatova,

teacher of school No. 282 of the city of Tashkent,

Abstract. *The article analyzes the main causes and determinants of Chinese migration to Central Asia. Political, economic, demographic, educational, and cultural factors are considered as interconnected components of a single system. The study substantiates that regional cooperation within the framework of the SCO and the Belt and Road Initiative, labor market demands, demographic pressure, and cultural exchanges contribute to the intensification of Chinese migration flows to Central Asian countries.*

Keywords: *Chinese migration, Central Asia, determinants, Belt and Road Initiative, SCO, demography, economic factors, educational exchange, migration policy.*

In the context of globalization processes, international migration has a profound impact on regional economic cooperation, demographic changes, and political relations. It has become one of the main drivers of the global redistribution of labor resources, the activation of capital and knowledge flows, as well as cultural dialogue and transnational integration processes.

In the 21st century, the foreign economic expansion of the People's Republic of China, the diversification of the industrial production model, and the policy of strengthening its geopolitical influence through the Belt and Road Initiative have given a new impetus to regional migration trends. This process encompassed not only investment and infrastructure projects, but also the movement of human resources.

The countries of Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan - have become a natural and strategic destination for Chinese migrants due to their geographical proximity, abundance of resources, safe transit routes, and opportunities for economic cooperation. At the same time, the different stages of economic development in the region, the needs of the labor market, and the diversity of the legal framework give migration processes a unique scale and dynamics.

As a result, the direction of Chinese migration to Central Asia is determined not only by economic interests, but also by political stability, demographic factors, and cultural influences. In this article, these determinants are systematically analyzed and assessed from the perspective of regional political and social stability.

Discussion

In the context of globalization processes, international migration has a profound impact on regional economic cooperation, demographic changes, and political relations. In the 21st century, China's foreign economic expansion and geopolitical interests have intensified migration flows in Central Asia. Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan,



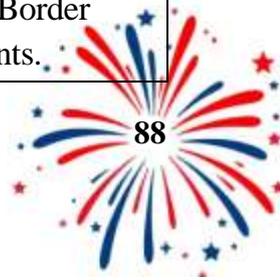
Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan - have become a natural destination for Chinese migrants due to their geographical proximity, abundance of resources, and strategic transit routes.

The region began to attract external labor due to the need for labor resources, infrastructure, and trade cooperation in economic development. At the same time, population density and labor surplus in China, especially economic restrictions in the western provinces, stimulated labor and entrepreneurial migration to neighboring countries.

In this process, not only economic factors, but also political, legal, and cultural conditions are of great importance. Cooperation between the countries of Central Asia and China has further intensified migration flows through major infrastructure projects, educational and cultural exchanges, especially within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Therefore, the study of the causes and determinants of China's migration to Central Asia is relevant for a deeper understanding of regional stability, economic cooperation, and social integration processes.

Causes and determinants of the direction of Chinese migration to Central Asia

Key factors	Description	Examples
Economic factors	In Central Asia, infrastructure projects and labor market demand stimulate migration.	Khorgos in Kazakhstan is the China-Kazakhstan cross-border cooperation center. Construction of the Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan-China railway. Chinese engineers at the Dangara cement plant in Tajikistan.
Demographic factors	The presence of surplus labor in China and the shortage of personnel in some sectors in Central Asia.	Young workers from the western regions of China (Xinjiang, Gansu). Labor demand in agriculture and construction in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.
Political and security factors	Legalization of migration and ensuring security through the SCO and bilateral agreements.	Facilitation of information exchange and visa processing through the SCO. Kazakhstan-China visa-free travel regime (from 2024). Kyrgyz-Chinese Border Security Agreements.



Key factors	Description	Examples
<p>Educational and cultural exchange</p>	<p>Through Chinese scholarships and Confucius Institutes, students, scholars, and cultural events serve migration.</p>	<p>In 2023, more than 14,000 Central Asian students studied in China. Confucius Institutes in Tashkent, Bishkek, Almaty. China State Scholarship (CSC) Program.</p>
<p>Transport and logistics and geographical factors</p>	<p>Neighborhood and transport corridors facilitate migration.</p>	<p>Movement of large goods and people through the Khorgos "Dry Border Port." "One Belt - One Road" railway lines (Chunshin-Tashkent-Europe).</p>
<p>Legal and institutional factors</p>	<p>Investment benefits and special procedures for migrants in the countries of Central Asia.</p>	<p>"Foreign Investor Visa" of Kazakhstan. Patent system for foreign specialists in Uzbekistan from 2023. Tax and land lease benefits for Chinese companies.</p>

The influx of Chinese migrants into the countries of Central Asia is primarily associated with economic needs and the imbalance of supply and demand in the labor market. The surplus of labor in China's domestic labor market, especially in the western regions - Xinjiang, Gansu, and Qinghai - due to insufficient employment, increased the need for access to foreign markets.

Moreover, migration between Central Asia and China is not limited to labor and economic factors, but is also significantly intensifying through educational and cultural exchanges. Since the second decade of the 21st century, China has been actively developing scientific cooperation and academic exchanges with the countries of Central Asia. This process led to the growth of "scientific migration" (academic migration) in the region. At the same time, Chinese students are also interested in studying in the countries of Central Asia. This is mainly due to linguistic and cultural proximity, the opening of joint educational programs, and joint research centers. For example, the number of Chinese students at the Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies, the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, and the Kyrgyz-Chinese joint educational centers is growing every year.



Хитой миграциясининг Марказий Осиёга йўналиш сабаблари (эксперт баҳоси, %)



Note: The distribution is approximate and is based on data from sources such as IOM, World Bank, UN DESA, SCO 2023-2024 reports.

In this diagram, the main factors determining the direction of Chinese migration to Central Asia are shown by their weight in expert assessments. The largest share is made up of economic factors (30%), which depend on investment and the labor market in the region. Demographic factors (20%) - the influence of labor demand and excess resources in China. Political and security factors (20%) - aimed at intergovernmental agreements and ensuring stability. Educational and cultural exchange (15%) has intensified in recent years, stimulating "scientific migration" through joint programs and universities. Geographical and logistical factors (10%) relate to the transit significance of the region, while legal and institutional factors (5%) relate to visa and migration policy. Indeed, while economic and demographic factors are the main drivers, education, cultural cooperation, and legal conditions support the sustainable development of migration.

The direction of Chinese migration to Central Asia is a multifaceted and structurally complex process. The main factors determining this process are economic, geopolitical, and socio-demographic determinants, which create both new opportunities and complex political and social challenges for the states of Central Asia.

First of all, economic factors are the main driving force of Chinese migration. In China, especially in the western regions (Xinjiang, Gansu, Qinghai), the surplus of labor and the imbalance of urbanization increased the need for access to foreign markets. At the same time, the need of Central Asian countries - especially Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan - for modernization of the energy sector and infrastructure has created a wide market for Chinese labor migrants. As noted in the World Bank (2024) and ADB (2023) reports, Chinese engineers and technical specialists make up a significant share in projects for the construction of large oil and gas pipelines, railways, and roads.

Secondly, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has qualitatively changed migration flows in the region. The railways, highways, and pipelines built by China have transformed Central Asia



into a central hub of the Eurasian trading system, linking migration processes to the development of transport and infrastructure. This has made the region an attractive destination not only for labor migrants, but also for entrepreneurs and specialized personnel.

Thirdly, geostrategic and political factors combined Chinese migration with foreign policy interests in the region. Participation in infrastructure projects in Central Asia is increasing the dependence of some countries on Chinese investment and influencing their foreign policy decisions.

Fourthly, educational and cultural exchanges are also important as a factor stimulating the migration process. According to UNESCO, the number of students from Central Asia studying in China has increased significantly in recent years, which has intensified the process of "scientific migration." At the same time, Chinese students are also developing cultural and academic ties by studying at universities in Central Asia.

As one of the world's most influential scholars in the field of international relations and geopolitics, Zbigniew Brzezinski, noted, Central Asia is a "chessboard" of global geopolitical competition, and the issue of control over transport and energy corridors is crucial not only for economic but also for strategic advantages. Therefore, Chinese migration intersects with the interests of Russia, Turkey, India, the USA, and the EU in the region, and in some cases intensifies competition.

Conclusion. The direction of Chinese migration to Central Asia, as a multifaceted process, is formed in the combination of economic needs, geostrategic interests, infrastructure and educational ties, as well as foreign policy competition. While this process allows for the development of integration, trade, and technology exchange in the region, it simultaneously increases the risk of economic dependence and political influence. Therefore, it is advisable for the states of Central Asia, along with effectively using the opportunities of cooperation with China, to pursue a balanced policy aimed at protecting their national interests and economic independence.

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