

A New Hegemon in Russia's Backyard?

Assessing China's Implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative in Kazakhstan.

Abstract

By assessing the implementation of China's BRI in Kazakhstan, this article examines a potential threat posed by the BRI to Russian hegemony in Central Asia. Analysing the implications that the initiative incorporates for the regional power balances and by applying concepts of hegemony found in both neo-Gramscianism and neoliberal institutionalism, the authors argue that a considerable shift in regional hegemony is underway and that, as the BRI grows stronger, it could eventually lead to China gaining the ability of shaping 'forms of state' of Kazakhstan and becoming a hegemon, a development underlined by both theories. In the case of Kazakhstan, arguing along the dimensions of political economic as well as social shifts away from Russia and towards China, the article finds that China has increased its influence through the new institutions and norms provided by the initiative to such a degree that it fulfils the requirements for hegemony, which could possibly trigger a transition in the entire Central Asian region.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative, China, Russia, Kazakhstan, hegemony.

Authors: Jakob Kjeldsen Bro; Dana Klomfass; Vincent Shanti Rafael Scharnberg; Jens Lie Stokbro; Carina Lykke Svindborg

Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's aspiration to be a hegemon in Central Asia has for years been relatively successful since political economic, and cultural cohesion has tied Central Asian states to Russia (Buranelli, 2018). Today, Russia still plays a large economic and political role in many former Soviet states and in the largest and most economically developed Central Asian state, Kazakhstan (Buranelli, 2018; Kuhrt, 2018). With Kazakhstan's wealth in natural resources, such as oil and gas, its relatively high level of development, and its strategic geographic position in Central Asia, the country is of great interest to Russia (Pepe, 2016). Yet, Kazakhstan has lately started to look towards China and has become one of China's prime partners in Central Asia. This is evident by the fact that China's President, Xi Jinping, first introduced the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) in 2013 in Kazakhstan's capital (Kassenova, 2017). The former President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, perceived the initiative as an opportunity to advance the country's infrastructure and enhance trade relations between the two countries.

As China has experienced rapid economic growth during the last 40 years, the Chinese government increasingly emphasises the importance of global market access (Mayer, 2018). The BRI, which aims at developing this global market access, will cost an estimated 800 billion USD and will mainly be funded by Chinese financial institutions, such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), making it the largest infrastructure and development project ever introduced. By 2017, 22 countries had already signed the BRI *Memorandum of Understanding* and therefore agreed to the establishment of the initiative, and the number of countries participating is increasing constantly (Alon et al., 2018). The BRI aims at creating cooperation on five critical connections: infrastructure construction, unimpeded trade, financial integration, policy coordination, and 'people-to-people bond' (State Council, 2015). The method of establishing said cooperation is to create new transportation routes inspired by the ancient Silk Road, which will consist of two parts, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, going through Asia, Africa, and Europe (Mayer, 2018). The Silk Road Economic Belt includes six land routes, implementing the transportation and logistic framework needed for the BRI (Duval et al., 2017).

For Russia, the initiative with all its possible economic and political implications could be seen as a worrying interference with the country's role as a Central Asian hegemon, as the BRI will pass through Kazakhstan and other Central Asian states, thereby developing the economic and

political environments in the region in a direction beneficial to China (Peyrouse, 2017). To Russia, a Central Asia dominated by China is equally threatening as a Central Asia dominated by the West (Fels, 2018) despite the fact that China has formerly emphasised the importance of a peaceful international environment (Mayer, 2018). This article investigates why the implementation of the Chinese BRI in Kazakhstan could be perceived by Russia as posing a threat to Russian hegemonic power in Central Asia.

Theoretical Framework

Applying Robert W. Cox' theory on neo-Gramscian hegemony enables to present how the BRI and its implementation in Kazakhstan could be seen as a threat to Russian hegemony in the Central Asian region. Hegemony concerns more than simply political and economic power with Cox arguing that social and cultural aspects are crucial (Cox, 1981). Especially the reciprocal triangular relation between the 'social forces', 'forms of state', and 'world orders', which Cox argues for when raising the concept to an international level, provides a comprehensive theoretical framework to analyse the broader correlations that affect and enable hegemony. Hereby 'social forces' are seen as the organisation and processes of production, 'forms of state' are derived from the relation between the state and the society, and the 'world orders' are seen as the configuration of the three forces of material power, ideas and institutions. Taking Russian hegemony over Kazakhstan into account, it is relevant to examine how the BRI might affect the social, economic, and inter-state relations between the countries and whether the initiative can make Kazakhstan follow Chinese interests and thereby threaten Russian hegemony. This is not to say that it is China's goal to threaten Russian hegemony in the area, rather the neo-Gramscian theory is going to be used as a tool to see if this might be perceived as the consequence of the BRI.

Further, to illustrate the ways in which Kazakhstan is changing its political economic orientation from focusing on regional economic and political institutions, shaped and promoted by Russia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and instead turning towards a globally-aimed framework promoted by China today, Robert O. Keohane's theory on neoliberal institutionalism is applied. Viewing these political and economic frameworks as international institutions created, moulded, and promoted by the self-interest of different states with different political and economic power levels (Keohane, 1984), the article seeks to analyse how the Chinese BRI can be perceived as posing a threat to Russian hegemony in Central Asia. To this end, the article discusses which consequences Kazakhstan's shift towards a more globally

aimed political economy may have for Central Asian power relations. However, in viewing the BRI as an institution capable of shifting current power relations in Central Asia, the application of neoliberal institutionalism does not propose that the initiative simply poses an economic and political zero-sum game in which a gain for China correlates to a loss for Russia. Rather, even though the initiative is seen as an institution created according to Chinese self-interest, it may create the possibility of Russian economic gains alongside China.

Weakening Cooperation with Russia

After the announcement of the BRI in 2013, Russia immediately proposed the establishment of a new regional trade union, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) (Zank, 2017), which can be seen as a reaction to China's plans. The EAEU was meant to create a large, unified trade zone, implementing common tariffs and regional trade laws in Central Asia with Russia inviting 12 former Soviet Republics to join (Eurasian Economic Commission, 2015). Despite this Russian attempt to create a large economic area, only Kazakhstan and Belarus joined the EAEU as founding members. As Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries have tied themselves closer to China through the BRI, which could lead to the decline of Russia's economic influence on the former Soviet Republics, the EAEU could be seen as a Russian-led institution attempting to regain Russian hegemonic power over the Central Asian states (Zank, 2017). This attempt seems to be failing, as several EAEU member states have criticised the union, and Kazakhstan in particular has reserved its right to withdraw its membership if the union does not bring about the expected results of opening up to global markets (Peyrouse, 2017).

The official *Foreign Policy Concept for 2014-2020 of the Republic of Kazakhstan* underlines Kazakhstan's ambitions to take part in global markets by setting the goal of '(...) full-scale participation of the country in international and financial institutions (...) ' (Foreign Policy Concept, 2014) while protecting Kazakhstan's self-interests. The continuation of strengthening the bilateral ties to the historically closest partner, Russia, is mentioned as the first regional priority in the document. Furthermore, the participation in the EAEU is mentioned. Furthermore, the document states the deepening of the 'comprehensive strategic partnership with China' as the second regional priority. Despite underlining the importance of dialogue regarding various topics, such as development of energy infrastructure and trade, the document does not mention the BRI by name (Foreign Policy Concept, 2014). Arguably, however, the implications of this policy, which suggests higher importance of keeping ties to Russia than

taking part in the BRI, shifted to a reverse priority. Nazarbayev's pro-China remarks regarding the BRI depict a shift in foreign policy priorities towards the Eastern neighbour, as the former president highlighted the strategic complementarity between the BRI and the Kazakhstani infrastructure programme 'Nurly Zhol'. The eagerness to support the initiative derives from the willingness to consolidate the role of Kazakhstan as the economic bridge between East and West (Indeo, 2018).

As Kazakhstan is increasingly leaning towards China, Russia might feel itself compelled to follow more assertive policies. Yet, following Keohane's neoliberal institutionalism (1984), Russian attempts at asserting dominance over Kazakhstan would generate serious discord in Central Asia, as Russia would impede on China's goal of realising the BRI and improving its international trade. However, China's possibility of being a new hegemon in Central Asia can also be seen as impeding on the Russian goal of maintaining a closely related Central Asia built on Russian ideals. Either way, Russia fighting the BRI with trade sanctions on China, would cause discord in Central Asia, which could potentially lead to a greater loss for Russia, economically and politically. Instead, it would be better for Russia to cooperate with China on the BRI, which is arguably why the initiative has received Russian support (Lee, 2019).

Strengthening Cooperation with China

The main foundation of the current cooperation between China and Kazakhstan is the common agreement regarding the implementation of the BRI. The initiative improves Chinese-Kazakhstani trade relations, which have been established through joint ventures and Chinese foreign direct investments (FDI). These FDIs, which Kazakhstan has benefitted from for decades, and which mainly concern the oil fields of western Kazakhstan (Peyrouse, 2008), foster growth and have since the introduction of the BRI increased rapidly, making Kazakhstan China's largest trade partner in Central Asia. The announcement of the BRI and the signing of the *Joint Declaration on New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan* (hereafter Joint Declaration) in 2015 happened at a crucial point in the Kazakhstani economic development, as Kazakhstan's economic growth had slowed and placed the country in strong need for new trading partners and investors (Indeo, 2018). The Joint Declaration promised cooperation in the development of the energy sector, infrastructural construction, and the linkage of the Kazakhstani 'Nurly Zhol' development programme to the BRI, providing Kazakhstan with billions in FDIs as well as economic and technical support for infrastructure development. This Chinese-Kazakhstani

programme's costs accumulate to approximately 26 billion USD including infrastructural, financial and logistic optimisation (Kassenova, 2017; Joint Declaration, 2015). This is forging a closer alliance and relationship between the two countries.

The 'Nurly Zhol' entails development of Kazakhstan's infrastructure through various initiatives, which all contribute to three specific goals; increasing GDP by 15.7% compared to 2014, creating 395,500 new jobs, and increasing the World Economic Forum ranking of quality of basic infrastructure, and in that way ensure economic growth and necessary anti-crisis measures (Nurly Zhol, 2015). Investing in this programme can help meet China's needs for natural resources, as well as fast transportation to Europe, and make China a powerful geopolitical center of Central Asia. This would allow China to shape rules and regulations, thereby generating gains in terms of power positioning and economy. Cooperating with China is also favourable for Kazakhstan as becoming the link between the East and the West has been part of the Kazakhstani strategy since its independence (Kassenova, 2017). Because of China's rapid economic growth, China serves as an inspiration for Kazakhstan, and the two countries often share opinions in international politics. Clearly then, with its economic growth, increasing market access, and outward investments, China has gained the ability to actively shape institutions. In the case of Kazakhstan, China thus, in Cox's words, partakes in shaping the Kazakhstani form of state, as is evident from the close cooperation taking place between the BRI and the Nurly Zhol, which is significantly altering the internal political situation in Kazakhstan.

From a neoliberal institutionalist viewpoint (Keohane, 1984), as China is the founder of the BRI, as well as the stronger state of this specific cooperation, it will have the largest influence on the creation of an international regime. Furthermore, China plays the main part in shaping rules, decision-making procedures, principles, and norms in the BRI, as well as the policy-coordination according to its own self-interest. Therefore, both theories underline that as the BRI grows stronger, it could eventually lead to China gaining the ability of shaping 'forms of state' of Kazakhstan and becoming a hegemon.

Kazakhstan's Shift in Trade Relations

Since gaining independence, Kazakhstan gradually integrated into international and regional trade organisations and was able to establish bilateral relations and strategic partnerships with various states, in and outside the former Soviet Union, while keeping the strategic economic

ties to the hegemon, Russia. Kazakhstan transitioned from isolation in bilateral relations with Russia to nowadays being successfully integrated in global markets (Pepe, 2016). The establishment of the BRI gave new incentives to Kazakhstan to diversify its multi-vectoral foreign policy and weaken Russia's influential power on its economy. This new institution is claiming an economic area, which Russia has tried to bind closely to itself, weakening Russia's influence and reshaping the Central Asian regional 'world order' in the sense of Cox' theory of hegemony (1983). Especially the construction of transportation routes to Kazakhstan's Caspian Sea ports threatens Russia's hegemony over the Central Asian economy as this will provide transportation infrastructure connecting Europe with China without passing Russian territory (Peyrouse, 2017).

The Joint Declaration between Kazakhstan and China outlines their priorities of development (Joint Declaration, 2015). Particularly, trade and manufacturing will diminish Russia's economic influence and facilitate Kazakhstan's shift towards China through a set of policies. These policies will enhance and diversify the Chinese-Kazakhstani trade by increasing the share of high-tech goods and promote Kazakhstan's rise in global value chains by developing chemical industries, enabling the country to export further developed goods (Kassenova, 2017). This diversification of Kazakhstan's economy and the new incentives given to widen its trade with China, as well as Kazakhstan's position along the BRI transportation routes, could allow Kazakhstan to produce a broader variety of goods and import from additional countries. As Russia's imports from Kazakhstan mainly include crude resources and Russia's exports to Kazakhstan mainly consist of final goods and refined resources, this poses a severe economic threat to Russia. Kazakhstan could possibly import less from Russia, while knowing that Russia will stay dependent on Kazakhstan exporting to Russia (Pepe, 2016).

Since the 1990s, a decrease in the share of exports towards Russia and an increase to other countries indicate a strong trade diversification of Kazakhstan. Because the coordination of the BRI and the Nurlı Zhol facilitates the realisation of Kazakhstan's goals, cooperation with China is arguably in Kazakhstan's self-interest. In 2001, Russia was still the main destination for Kazakhstani goods, while in 2007, China had overtaken Russia, as over 50% more in value was exported to Kazakhstan's Eastern neighbour (UN Comrade, 2019). This diversification in trade partners arose from a variety of incentives given for Kazakhstan in the last decades to loosen its economic ties to Russia. The establishment of new institutions, unions, and

initiatives, such as the BRI, helped the country to open up and profit from global trade (Pepe, 2016) and attract FDIs (Indeo, 2018).

Moving away from Russian Linguistics – Integrating Chinese Culture

Cox (1983) argues that the emulation of a hegemon's culture in peripheral states abroad is one of the pillars on which hegemonic power rests. Today, Kazakhstan has two official languages, Kazakh and Russian. Around 94% of the Kazakhstani population is fluent in Russian, whereas roughly 74% of the population is fluent in Kazakh (Chen, 2018). Furthermore, even well into the 2000s, Russian still remained the working language of the Kazakhstani government and many other official institutions within the state apparatus (Medvedev, 2007).

In 2014, the Kazakhstani government called for development of greater English skills in the Kazakhstani society (Zhuzhumina, 2014) to foster greater integration into global education and financial systems. Linguistic shifts are also bringing Kazakhstan closer to China, as government officials have called on the Kazakhstani population to learn Chinese. As more Chinese companies are established in Kazakhstan, the Chinese language is becoming more attractive, and the number of Kazakhstanis learning Chinese has increased more than fivefold from 2006 to 2016 (Farchy, 2016). Furthermore, in 2017, the Kazakhstani government approved a transition from a Cyrillic script to the Latin alphabet (Illmer et al., 2017). If implemented completely, these linguistic changes will weaken Russia's hegemonic ties considerably.

To Nazarbayev, several Asian countries have provided strong models of modernisation that may prove more beneficial to Kazakhstan than Western models (President of Kazakhstan, 2017), thereby outlining a certain attraction to and complementarity with the Chinese development model. For decades, China has defined various development and modernisation goals with the amendment 'with Chinese characteristics', holding traditional values high while adapting to the modern world (Link, 2015). As cultural hegemony in a neo-Gramscian sense is achieved when the hegemon's interests and beliefs become aspects of future emulation abroad (Cox, 1983), the similarities in China's typical modernisation scheme to the one Nazarbayev has pragmatically promoted imply that China is succeeding in spreading its 'world order' in Central Asia. Nonetheless, this does not prove a simple uncritical acceptance of all Chinese policies.

Still, as part of the BRI, China has actively promoted exchange of culture and knowledge. With what is referred to as ‘people-to-people bond’, the Chinese government is attempting to establish scientific, medical, and cultural ties with the countries cooperating on the BRI (State Council, 2015). The measures implemented regarding cultural ties between China and Kazakhstan show in events such as the 2017 World Expo of Future Energy, a subject which Kazakhstan and China are cooperating on (Gong, 2017). The BRI, furthermore, proposes a framework for new cultural and academic exchanges on a global scale, and increasing academic exchange between Kazakhstan and China can be seen in both countries. Between 2013 and 2017 more than 11,000 students from Kazakhstan studied in China, showing a constant increase (Gong, 2017).

The ambitious implementation of the BRI can lead to Chinese hegemony in Central Asia as its ‘people-to-people bond’ will affect the sphere of ‘social forces’. Moreover, the newly established institutions, such as the AIIB, and sets of norms related to the initiative influence the sphere of ‘world order’. The reciprocal relation between these spheres will further affect the ‘forms of state’ as on an international political level, the BRI with its connection with the ‘Nurly Zhol’ has already influenced Kazakhstani policies, thus entailing all three spheres required for hegemony according to Cox (1983). Yet, this description of how these three international spheres affect each other is not the only way in which the spheres have a reciprocal triangular relation. These changes that the BRI may start in Kazakhstan’s domestic and international affairs, its economy, and its culture would possibly allow China to claim the hegemonic role from Russia. Moreover, the BRI can be understood as an institution in the sense of Keohane (1984), as it provides a new set of norms and rules, which countries taking part in the initiative have to adhere to, thus giving China the possibility to create an international regime, establishing its hegemonic position in Central Asia. To Keohane (1984), a final requirement for becoming a hegemon is the willingness to lead intergovernmental relations, a willingness which China shows by pushing through its BRI. The Action Plan (2015) verifies this willingness by putting a focus on Chinese-initiated intergovernmental cooperation to countries in Asia, Europe and Africa.

Conclusion: China on its Way to Hegemony?

The implementation of the BRI in Kazakhstan can be perceived as a threat to Russian hegemonic power in Central Asia, because, on the one hand, Russia's influence on Kazakhstani culture and political economy declined since the announcement of the initiative, and, on the other hand, China increased its influence through the new institutions and norms provided by the initiative to such a degree that it fulfils the requirements for hegemony, which could possibly trigger a transition in the entire Central Asian region.

Even years after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia still held hegemony over Central Asia. However, since the announcement of the BRI in 2013, Russia's influence on Kazakhstani culture and political economy has been declining despite Russia's attempt of a countermeasure to the BRI through the creation of the EAEU in 2014. With Russia no longer being the biggest importer of Kazakhstani goods, Kazakhstan is broadening its access to the global market, thus becoming less reliant on Russia.

Further, with the BRI, China has increased its influence in Central Asia. Kazakhstan has strengthened its trade with China over the last decades, showing a rising mutual economic interest between the countries, enhanced by the Joint Declaration. The 'Nurly Zhol' has the goals of modernising Kazakhstan's infrastructure in terms of education, logistics, industry, and energy. Pragmatically joining forces with China, thus, gives Kazakhstan the economic and institutional structure to fulfil these goals.

New Kazakhstani policies show that the country is moving closer to China culturally. After the announcement of the BRI, Nazarbayev implemented various policies to strengthen the Kazakhstani identity with methods inspired by Chinese modernisation schemes. The BRI has actively promoted 'people-to-people bond' with educational exchange. Through these exchanges and due to the constantly increasing number of Chinese companies in Kazakhstan, the Chinese language has become more prevalent in Kazakhstani society.

The close cooperation between a new possible hegemon and Central Asia's most developed economy provides the possibility that the rest of Central Asia could follow Kazakhstan's example and cooperate more with China, turning away from Russia in hope of experiencing the same development as Kazakhstan. As China is increasing its influence in a broad variety of fields, both political economic and cultural, it is most likely that the vigorous implementation

of the BRI makes Russia perceive the initiative as a threat to Russian hegemony in Central Asia.

Authors' affiliation

Jakob Kjeldsen Bro, *M.Sc./LL.M Candidate China and International Relations;*

Dana Klomfass, *M.Sc./LL.M. Graduate China and International Relations;*

Vincent Shanti Rafael Scharnberg, *M.Sc./LL.M. Graduate China and International Relations;*

Jens Lie Stokbro, *M.Sc. Graduate Development and International Relations/Chinese Area Studie;*

Carina Lykke Svindborg, *M.Sc. Graduate Development and International Relations*

References

Alon, Il.; Lattmann, Ch.; Zhang, W. (eds.) (2018). *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Changing the Rules of Globalisation*. Cham: Springer International Publishing.

Buranelli, F. C. (2018). Spheres of Influence as Negotiated Hegemony – The Case of Central Asia. In: *Geopolitics*, Vol. 23, No. 2. London: Routledge. pp. 378-403.

Buranelli, F. C.; Kuhrt, Natasha (2018). Russia and the CIS in 2017: Russia in Asia: Succumbing to China's Embrace. In: *Asian Survey*, Vol. 58, No. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 55-64.

Chen, D. (2018). The Cost of Changing an Entire Country's Alphabet. In: *BBC News*, 25 April. Retrieved 19.05.2019 from <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20180424-the-cost-of-changing-an-entire-countrys-alphabet>

Cox, R. W. (1981). Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory. In: *Millennium: Journal of international Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2. London: Sage Publications. pp. 126-155.

Cox, R. W. (1983). Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method. In: *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2. London: Sage Publications. pp. 162-175.

Duval, Y.; Ramasamy, B.; Utoktham, Ch.; Yeung, M. (2017). Trade and trade facilitation along the Belt and Road Initiative corridors. In: *ARTNeT Working Paper Series*, No. 172. Bangkok: ESCAP. <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/AWP172.pdf>

Eurasian Economic Commission (2015). EURASIAN ECONOMIC INTEGRATION: FACTS AND FIGURES. http://www.eurasiancommission.org/en/Documents/broshura26_ENGL_2014.pdf

Fels, E. (2018). The Geopolitical Significance of Sino-Russian Cooperation in Central Asia for the Belt and Road Initiative. In: Mayer, Maximilian (ed.). *Rethinking the Silk Road. China's*

Belt and Road Initiative and Emerging Eurasian Relations. Singapore: Springer Nature. pp. 247-266.

Gong, Z. (2017, November 1). Kazakhstan seeks more cultural exchanges with China. *CGTN.com*. https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d517a4d7a677a4d/share_p.html?fbclid=IwAR3uoZVFRR6yRKj3644oYrbYrl3FETZ1B_5KOJNi_5WwMyXi7mfzS3GHS2k

Illmer, A.; Daniyarov, E.; Rakhimov, Z. (2017, October 31). Kazakhstan to Qasaqstan: Why would a country switch its alphabet? *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41800186>

Indeo, F. (2018). The Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on Central Asia: Building New Relations in a Reshaped Geopolitical Scenario. In: Alon, Ilan; Lattmann, Christoph; Zhang, Wenxian (eds.). *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Changing the Rules of Globalisation*. Cham: Springer International Publishing. pp. 135-153.

Joint Declaration on New Stage of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan, Signed Aug. 31st, 2015 in Beijing. <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/zchj/sbwj/1434.htm>

Kassenova, N. (2017). China's Silk Road and Kazakhstan's Bright Path: Linking Dreams of Prosperity. In: *Asia Policy*, No. 24. Washington D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research. pp. 110-116.

Keohane, R. O. (1984). *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Keohane, R. O. (1988). International Institutions: two Approaches. In: *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 4. Oxford University Press. pp. 379-396.

Lee, Jeong-ho (2019, April 26). China and Russia forge stronger Eurasian economic ties as Vladimir Putin gets behind Xi Jinping's belt and road plan in face of US hostility In: *South China Morning Post*. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3007883/china-and-russia-forge-stronger-eurasian-economic-ties>

Link, P. (2015). What It Means to Be Chinese. In: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 94, Iss. 3. New York: Council on Foreign Relations. pp. 25-31.

Mayer, M. (ed.) (2018). *Rethinking the Silk Road. China's Belt and Road Initiative and Emerging Eurasian Relations*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Medvedev, R. (2007). The Russian Language Throughout the Commonwealth of Independent States: Toward a Statement of the Problem. In: *Russian Politics and Law*, Vol. 45, No. 3. London: Routledge. pp. 5-30.

Official Site of The President of The Republic of Kazakhstan (2017): Course towards the future: modernization of Kazakhstan's identity. http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/press_conferences/course-towards-the-future-modernization-of-kazakhstans-identity

Pepe, J. M. (2016). *Beyond Energy: Trade and Transport in a Reconnecting Eurasia*. Berlin: Springer VS.

Peyrouse, S. (2008). Chinese Economic Presence in Kazakhstan: China's Resolve and Central Asia's Apprehension. In: *China Perspectives*. French Centre for Research on Contemporary China. pp. 34-49.

Peyrouse, S. (2017). The Evolution of Russia's Views on the Belt and Road Initiative. In: *Asia Policy*, No. 24. Washington D.C.: National Bureau of Asian Research. pp. 96-102.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Kazakhstan (2014). Foreign Policy Concept for 2014 – 2020 Republic of Kazakhstan. <http://mfa.gov.kz/en/content-view/kontseptsiya-vneshnoj-politiki-rk-na-2014-2020-gg>

The Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Official Website [Nurly Zhol] (2015). The state program of infrastructure development "Nurly Zhol" for 2015-2019. https://primeminister.kz/en/page/view/gosudarstvennaya_programma_infrastrukturnogo_razvitiya_nurli_zhol_na_2015_2019_godi

The State Council. The People's Republic of China. Action plan on the Belt and Road Initiative. 30.03.2015. http://english.gov.cn/archive/publications/2015/03/30/content_281475080249035.htm

The United Nations International Trade Statistics Database [UN Comtrade]. <https://comtrade.un.org/data/>

Zank, W. (2017). The Eurasian Economic Union: A Brittle Road Block on China's "One Belt – One Road" - A Liberal Perspective. In: *Journal of China and International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 1. pp. 67-92.

Zhumzhumina, A. (2014). Nazarbayev calls Kazakhstan to Learn English. In: *Tengrinews* website, 1 December. <https://en.tengrinews.kz/edu/Nazarbayev-calls-Kazakhstan-to-learn-English-24393/>