COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF APPROACHES OF LOCAL AND FOREIGN AUTHORS TO THE PROCESS OF CENTRAL ASIAN COOPERATION (AFTER 2018)

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ABSTARCT.
The year 2018 marked a major turning point for Central Asian regionalism with the inaugural Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia in Astana – an initiative spurred largely by Uzbekistan's post-2016 foreign policy pivot under President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. This article provides a comparative analytical review of scholarship published after 2018, contrasting the perspectives, frameworks, and normative priorities of regional (local, i.e. Central Asian) authors against those of foreign (Western, Russian, and Chinese) academics and policy analysts.
Keywords: Central Asia, regional cooperation, scholars, comparison, Uzbekistan, geopolitics, border issues, Russia, China, US.

АННОТАЦИЯ.
2018 год стал важным поворотным моментом для регионализма в Центральной Азии: в Астане состоялась первая Консультативная встреча глав государств Центральной Азии – инициатива, во многом обусловленная изменением внешней политики Узбекистана после 2016 года при президенте Шавкате Мирзиёеве. В данной статье представлен сравнительный аналитический обзор научных работ, опубликованных после 2018 года, сопоставляющий взгляды, концепции и нормативные приоритеты региональных (местных, т.е. центральноазиатских) авторов с взглядами, концепциями и приоритетами зарубежных (западных, российских и китайских) ученых и политических аналитиков.
Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, региональное сотрудничество, ученые, сравнение, Узбекистан, геополитика, пограничные вопросы, Россия, Китай, США.

ANNOTATSIYA.
2018-yil Markaziy Osiyo mintaqaviylashuvi uchun muhim burilish nuqtasi bo‘ldi. Bu Markaziy Osiyo davlat rahbarlarining Ostonada bo‘lib o‘tgan birinchi maslahat uchrashuvi bilan bog‘liq edi – bu tashabbus asosan Prezident Shavkat Mirziyoyev boshchiligidagi O'zbekistonning 2016-yildan keyingi yangi tashqi siyosat yo'nalishi bilan rag'batlantirildi. Ushbu maqolada 2018-yildan keyin nashr etilgan ilmiy tadqiqotlarning qiyosiy tahliliy sharhi keltirilgan bo'lib, unda mintaqaviy (mahalliy, ya'ni Markaziy Osiyolik) mualliflarning nuqtai nazarlari, doiralari va me'yoriy ustuvorliklari xorijiy (G'arb, Rossiya va Xitoy) olimlari va siyosat tahlilchilarining nuqtai nazarlari bilan taqqoslanadi.
Kalit so‘zlar: Markaziy Osiyo, mintaqaviy hamkorlik, olimlar, taqqoslash, O‘zbekiston, geosiyosat, chegara muammolari, Rossiya, Xitoy, AQSh.

1. Introduction

For nearly a decade prior to 2018, indigenous regional cooperation in Central Asia was largely stagnant. Scholars frequently questioned whether Central Asia constituted a functioning region or merely an arena for external power projection.

The launch of regular, intra-regional Consultative Meetings in 2018 revived academic discourse. However, scholarly interpretations of this "Central Asian Renaissance" vary substantially depending on the author's geographic origin and ideological context.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Approaches.

Author Group	Primary Theoretical Lenses	Main Analytical Focus
Local Authors *(Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan)*	Liberal Institutionalism, Constructivism, Pragmatic Realism	Intra-regional trade, border delimitation, shared heritage, sovereignty protection
Western Authors *(US, EU)*	Neorealism, New Regionalism, Critical Geopolitics	Strategic autonomy, balancing great powers, institutionalization models (ASEAN, Visegrád)
Russian Authors	Geopolitics, Hegemonic Stability, Structuralism	Compatibility with Eurasian Integration (EAEU, CSTO), security buffers, external influence
Chinese Authors	Geo-economics, Development Studies	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) alignment, infrastructure, regional stability for economic corridors

3. Key Findings & Discussion.

Most of the authors from Central Asia assert on the willpower of the heads of states of the region in the issues regarding deepening regionalism and reject the assumptions about the authorization of “five stans” by external powers like Russia or China. Meantime, foreign scholars see the process of regional integration in the context of geopolitical competition for the region of Central Asia.

Local authors emphasize that post-2018 cooperation is an **indigenous process** driven from within, rather than mandated by Moscow, Beijing, or Washington. They highlight local ownership, mutual trust, and a shared Central Asian identity ("Central Asia 2040"). Western and Russian authors often view Central Asian cooperation through the lens of the “Great Game”. While Western scholars praise the region's efforts to achieve strategic autonomy from Russia and China, Russian scholars often analyze intra-regional ties through their impact on Russian-led multilateral frameworks (EAEU, CSTO).

In terms of the institutionalization and informal cooperation in the region it must be stated that regional scholars generally favor **flexible, non-binding consultative mechanisms** over rigid supranational institutions. This reflects a consensus among regional leadership to preserve newly consolidated national sovereignty while facilitating practical problem-solving.

Western scholars, in contrast, frequently debate whether non-institutionalized cooperation can endure. Comparative studies often point to models like **ASEAN** or the **Visegrád Group** as viable blueprints for Central Asia, warning that a lack of formal institutions may lead to fragility in times of crisis.

When it comes to primary drivers of cooperation, we again can see differences in the positions of local and foreign academia. Local scholars focus heavily on practical, border-level issues: border demarcation (e.g., Kyrgyz-Tajik agreements), joint water management, mutual recognition of ID cards/visas, and intra-regional trade expansion. Chinese authors view economic modernization as the core driver, framing regional stability as a prerequisite for trans-Eurasian transport corridors (e.g., China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway). Western authors highlight external shocks (such as the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia) as primary catalysts accelerating Central Asia's search for alternative supply chains like the Middle Corridor.

The post-2018 academic literature reveals a narrowing gap between local and foreign assessments, though key differences remain. For example, both local and foreign scholars agree that Central Asian regionalism post-2018 is highly pragmatic and problem-driven rather than ideological. Foreign

academics tend to see the lack of a permanent secretariat or supranational treaty body as a structural weakness, whereas local scholars treat informal consultative summits as an essential design feature to respect sovereignty.

Local authors place far greater emphasis on shared identity and norms, i.e. cultural, historical, and civilizational bonds, as foundation stones for cooperation, whereas foreign analysts tend to treat these factors as secondary to geopolitical and economic incentives.

4. Conclusion

Scholarship published after 2018 reflects a fundamental shift: Central Asia is increasingly analyzed as an **active player** in global politics rather than a passive arena. While foreign authors bring valuable comparative frameworks (like ASEAN and Visegrád) and geopolitical context, local authors provide essential context regarding internal political dynamics, economic necessity, and regional diplomacy. Future research will benefit from bridging these approaches to evaluate the long-term resilience of Central Asian regionalism.

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