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CHINA'S CAUCASUS POLICY

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Abstract

This article examines China's evolving policies toward the Caucasus region, with a particular focus on the South Caucasus countries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia. It analyzes China's strategic interests in the region, including energy security, trade corridor development, and geopolitical balancing among Russia, the United States, and regional powers. The study highlights how China, while maintaining a strategic partnership with Russia that limits its involvement in the North Caucasus, actively pursues economic and commercial engagement in the South Caucasus through projects such as the TRACECA corridor, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, and the revival of the Silk Road. The article argues that China's growing energy demands and its desire to circumvent Western-dominated transit routes drive its increasing presence in the region. Despite historical and political complexities—including unresolved conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia—China pursues a pragmatic "One China" policy and fosters bilateral trade and investment ties. The paper concludes that as China's global influence expands, its role in the Caucasus will deepen, making it an increasingly important partner for the regional states.

Keywords: China, Caucasus, geopolitics, energy security, Silk Road, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Russia, TRACECA.

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqola Xitoyning Kavkaz mintaqasiga nisbatan o'zgaruvchan siyosatini, xususan, Janubiy Kavkazdagi Ozarbayjon, Armaniston va Gruziya davlatlariga

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qaratilgan holda tahlil qiladi. Maqolada Xitoyning mintaqadagi strategik manfaatlari – energiya xavfsizligi, savdo yo‘laklarini rivojlantirish hamda Rossiya, AQSh va mintaqaviy kuchlar o‘rtasida geosiyosiy muvozanatni saqlash masalalari ko‘rib chiqiladi. Tadqiqot shuni ko‘rsatadiki, Xitoy Rossiya bilan strategik sheriklik munosabatlarini saqlab, Shimoliy Kavkazdagi faolligini cheklagan holda, Janubiy Kavkazda iqtisodiy va tijorat aloqalarini faol rivojlantirmoqda. Buning amaliy ifodasi sifatida TRACECA transport koridori, Boku-Tbilisi-Qars temir yo‘li va Ipak yo‘lini qayta tiklash loyihalarini ko‘rsatish mumkin. Maqolada, Xitoyning ortib borayotgan energiya ehtiyojlari va G‘arb nazoratidagi tranzit yo‘llariga muqobil variantlarni izlashi uning Kavkazdagi ishtirokini kuchaytirayotgani ta’kidlanadi. Tog‘li Qorabog‘, Janubiy Osetiya va Abxaziyadagi muzokarali to‘qnashuvlar kabi tarixiy va siyosiy murakkabliklarga qaramay, Xitoy “Yagona Xitoy” tamoyiliga amal qilgan holda ikki tomonlama savdo va investitsiya aloqalarini rivojlantirmoqda. Xulosa qilib aytganda, Xitoyning global ta’siri kengaygan sari uning Kavkazdagi roli chuqurlashadi va u mintaqa davlatlari uchun tobora muhim sherikka aylanadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: Xitoy, Kavkaz, geosiyosat, energiya xavfsizligi, Ipak yo‘li, Ozarbayjon, Armaniston, Gruzziya, Rossiya, TRACECA

INTRODUCTION

"There is a sleeping giant. Let him sleep, for when he awakens, he will shake the world," said Napoleon, as if he foresaw these times. Only a Confucian framework could simultaneously harbor the wisdom of 2500 years of accumulated civilization and the catastrophe of the Maoist Cultural Revolution. The fact that China, with its 1000 km² area and 7 million population, has managed to maintain and incorporate Hong Kong – a miracle of capitalism – while simultaneously not abandoning communism, and achieving \$240 billion in exports and \$162 billion in national income, is a unique situation. With a population of 1.3 billion, a

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national income of \$6 trillion, exports of \$350 billion, and an annual growth rate of 10%, the dragon of Asia seems to have finally awakened. Its desire to have a say in Asia-Pacific and Eurasian strategies, combined with its immense demographic power and dynamic economy, makes it safe to say that China will be a decisive parameter in the power equation in the coming period. China, having transitioned from communism to pragmatism, is poised for social upheaval. Chinese history contains numerous examples of how unstable economic developments can lead to social and political explosions. However, a crisis in China is now inevitably likely to have global repercussions (1). Therefore, the world must be prepared for every move of this awakening giant. Otherwise, if states do not take China into account when formulating strategies, all their calculations could be overturned.

For example, according to a negative view circulating in people's minds, the existence of the "China Factor" improves relations between Russia and the West. Despite recent years, China's uneven growth has occurred rapidly, in contrast to Russia's national strength. That is, Russia needs to balance China's power through development relations with Western countries. This view suggests that the West is isolating Russia or that China is becoming marginalized in the international arena. Conversely, according to a positive view, China-Russia relations will not suffer from a major negative impact, even as Russia-US relations develop (2). Because China-Russia relations are the product of an unbreakable bond. It seems that China needs the developing bilateral relations with Russia more than ever. Because, regardless of what happens, Russia is still the world's largest natural gas supplier, and there is no indication that this will change in the near future. China's energy needs are increasing, but its own resources are insufficient to meet them (3). However, it should not be overlooked that developments in the global and regional context may certainly lead to a redistribution of the cards in the region. We are entering a new era where countries that were allies just a few years ago may now move towards separate camps. To put it more clearly, the Russia-China

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solidarity that naturally formed against the EU before may this time lead to a US-Russia solidarity against China. Moreover, it will not stop there. If China can successfully complete its economic, then military and political transformation in the region, it will become the number one rival of the US. Since this rise of China will also threaten Russia, Japan, and Türkiye, a natural Turkey-Russia-Japan and US axis may form in the region. While this scenario may seem premature today, it possesses sufficient data to easily become a reality tomorrow (4).

Unlike the USSR, China, which did not translate its gradual liberalization in economic life into the political sphere, achieved significant economic growth in the post-Cold War period without experiencing serious internal political turmoil, with the exception of the Tiananmen Square incident and the opposition movements concentrated in East Turkestan and Tibet. This economic power demonstrated by China, which is among the decisive actors of the international order as a member of the UN Security Council, has led to the development of strategic analyses on a Eurasian scale centered on China. While some Western strategists, like Huntington, portray China as the leading force of a potential anti-Western bloc, other strategists, such as Brzezinski, argue that China's increasing geopolitical sphere of influence may not conflict with the US's Eurasian interests, but rather could be directed in line with these interests (5).

In addition to all this, Brzezinski also states: "First of all, it is far from certain that China's explosive growth rates will continue for the next twenty years. The possibility of an economic slowdown cannot be ruled out. This in itself would reduce the credibility of these predictions. In fact, for this pace to be sustained for a long period in a historically significant way, an extremely harmonious combination of effective national leadership, political calm, domestic social discipline, high savings rates, continued high foreign investment flows, and regional stability would be required. The long-term combination of all these positive factors is doubtful. Moreover, China's rapid growth rate will likely

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produce political side effects that may restrict freedom of action. China's energy consumption already significantly exceeds its national production (6).

Brzezinski is right on some points. Yes, China's growth may slow down in the future. However, China is aware of this. Because China attaches vital importance to Central Asian and Caucasian resources, as well as Middle Eastern resources, in closing its rapidly growing energy deficit. It is projected that China's total primary energy consumption will increase by 26% between 1996-2020, increasing its imports to 8 million barrels per day (400 million tons per year). Considering that the US controls the transportation routes in its Middle Eastern purchases, China feels more secure in terms of controlling the routes in transportation from Central Asia and the Caucasus. In this geography, it can be said that they are pursuing a policy of "tolerance" with Russia in the rather difficult struggle of breaking the influence of the US (7).

The US's policy of trying to virtually blockade China is influential in China's adoption of such an attitude. Because the US's influence in the Caspian Basin Energy resources hold a special importance in its perspective. The US, which previously defined the Caspian region as its sphere of influence, declared it a "sphere of responsibility" from 1997 onwards. While its pre-9/11 policies towards the region were conducted through diplomatic and commercial channels, its post-9/11 stance has fundamentally changed. With the intervention in Afghanistan, it aimed to encircle China from the west and prevent China from accessing the region's energy resources via the Indian Ocean. Therefore, Central Asia is of strategic importance to the US not only in terms of investment opportunities and the sale of oil and natural gas to the US, but also in terms of the superiority it will provide to the US rivals in terms of natural gas and oil (8).

Within this framework, China prefers the southern regions in its Caucasus policies. This is because the Caucasus is fundamentally composed of two geopolitical planes: the North Caucasus and the three Caucasian Republics: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (9). Accordingly, in the North Caucasus, there

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is the Rostov Oblast, the Krasnodar and Stavropol Regions, Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, The Russian Federation includes the Kabardino-Balkaria (Kabardey-Malkar), North Ossetia (Alania), Ingushetia, the de facto independent Chechnya (Ichkeria), and the Dagestan Federal Republic. In the South Caucasus, there is Georgia, encompassing the de facto independent Abkhazia, Adjara, and South Ossetia (whose autonomous region status has been abolished and which is now de facto independent from Georgia); and Azerbaijan, encompassing Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh (which is under Armenian occupation and whose autonomous region status has been abolished by Azerbaijan, and which is now de facto independent) (10).

In this article, we will first focus on the importance of the Caucasus, then examine the individual countries, attempting to shed more light on the political, commercial, and cultural relationships China has established with the states in the region. In doing so, we will focus solely on the South Caucasus, as the North Caucasus is within Russian territory, making China unlikely to exert influence there. Furthermore, if China were to react to ethnic conflicts in the region, Russia would also react to East Turkestan and China only engages with Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia in the region because it can use the Tibet issue as leverage against China. Furthermore, the emphasis that globalization places on "democratization" and, within this dimension, its special value given to the ethnic dimension of human rights, along with the increasing restriction of the sovereign rights of nation-states, is unsettling for China, which has problems with East Turkestan (Xinjiang-Uyghur), Tibet, Inner Mongolia, and Taiwan. According to China, which finds the Western understanding of human rights divisive rather than unifying, "Human rights are collective, not individual. If an individual and the state clash, the issue is individual and cannot encompass the entire society. Human rights have both universal and local dimensions. Different interpretations of human rights may exist for each country. The West's interference in a country's

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internal affairs by placing human rights above the sovereignty of that country is an unacceptable approach." (11)

Due to the strategic partnership between China and Russia, China adopts different policies for the north and south of the Caucasus, like two sides of the same coin. In the near future, China is not expected to take concrete steps beyond continuing to view the North Caucasus as an internal affair of the Russian Federation, pursuing economically oriented projects in the South Caucasus, seeking to develop trade relations, and trying to improve relations with Armenia and Iran against the increasing influence of the West. We can also see that Russia and China have drawn closer from time to time due to Russia's Chechnya and China's East Turkestan issues. For example, the two countries conducted a joint military exercise called "Peace Mission 2009." Russia and China, who had previously conducted two other military exercises, claimed they were for "terrorists." According to Russian experts, neither side has ever experienced such security fears. Although Russian generals are not clear on this matter although no official statement has been made, the media unanimously agrees that the exercise was a rehearsal for a joint operation against Chechens and Uyghurs. In short, Russia and China conducted a joint exercise to intimidate Muslims whom they perceive as a threat within their countries (12).

The Geopolitical and Geostrategic Importance of the Caucasus

Looking at the geographical location of the Caucasus, we see that it is situated at the eastern end of a 5,000 km long water corridor formed by interconnected inland seas such as the Mediterranean, Aegean Sea, the Straits, and the Sea of Marmara, Black Sea, and Sea of Azov, which lies between the main arms of Europe, Africa, and Asia. It is also connected to and extended eastward by the Caspian Sea. Furthermore, the Euphrates and Tigris rivers are in a position and direction that allows the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean to easily connect to the Indian Ocean. In this case, the Caucasus is a region where north-south and

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east-west routes converge. The common goal of the foreign policies of Tsarist Russia, the USSR, and the current Russian Federation is to gain access to the open seas and thus to live as a dominant power. The Caucasus is at the beginning of the shortest route that will bring Russia to the Persian Gulf.

The Caucasus region is significant because it serves as the gateway to Central Asia, a gateway to Western markets for Central Asia, and possesses rich oil and natural gas reserves when considered as a whole with Central Asia (13). However, in terms of oil and natural gas reserves, the Caucasus is not of paramount importance to Russia. Oil production in the North Caucasus constitutes a very small share of Russia's total oil production, at only 1%. Essentially, the oil issue in the North Caucasus is not a matter of production, but rather a matter of transit (14). Therefore, the Caucasus is invaluable to Russia because of its location on potential pipeline routes for transporting Caspian oil to the West. The presence of oil refineries and petrochemical plants in the region also adds to its strategic and economic importance to Russia (15).

On the other hand, the Black Sea Basin, the Caucasus, and Central Asia region are targeted by major powers due to their energy security, making them a focal point of power struggles. The race between NATO and Russia to establish bases in countries in the region, their indirect inclusion in alliances through certain projects, and the occurrence of color revolutions demonstrate this power struggle. The region is a target area not only for the EU, the US, and Russia, but also for regional states such as China, Japan, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and India, due to its geostrategic importance, and these countries have also taken their places in the game (16).

The region has also benefited from increased cooperation between states as a result of pipeline construction. Indeed, the successful completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and SCP pipelines rapidly implemented a project to connect the railways of Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, providing a clear route from China to Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the European Union (17). The

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TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia), also known as the "21st Century Silk Road Project," is an East-West corridor encompassing all transportation systems, primarily rail, aimed at connecting the resource-rich Central Asian republics to Europe via the Caucasus, a project initiated by the European Union. Dubbed the "Silk Railway" because it aims to revive the historical "Silk Road" in railway networks, the project will connect to the European railway network in the west via the Marmaray tunnel under the Bosphorus, and to the railway lines of Kazakhstan and China in the east. The project, expected to be completed within three years at the latest with an investment of \$400 million, envisions a train traveling uninterrupted from the UK to China. Kazakhstan, which is expected to participate in the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku (BTK) railway project, the Asia-Europe branch of the TRACECA corridor, signed in February 2007, is also in contact with China regarding this matter. Once the Dostyk-Aktau railway, connecting the Aktan port in western Kazakhstan with China, is completed, it will enable the transportation of Kazakh and Chinese cargo to the Caucasus and Europe. Therefore, Beijing, interested in the project, plans to bypass Russian territory and transport its goods to Europe via the South Caucasus and Turkey. Indeed, with the project's realization, a train departing from China will be able to travel uninterrupted to the heart of Europe (18).

China's Relations with Regional Countries

China's relationship with the South Caucasus states relies on the West, Russia, Iran, and Türkiye to ensure access to transit corridors, trade routes, and the region's energy resources, and to facilitate its economic expansion. Its balancing position regarding Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia effectively protects Beijing's economic presence in the region and its interests with regional states that favor its "China Only" policy.

China's economic expansion in the South Caucasus is growing at a truly rapid pace, despite lagging behind other countries. In a way, this is a result of the

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limited transit capacity, restricted resources, and delayed regional cooperation that the geography allows. However, China's intensive exploration of resources, trade, and transit corridors to fuel its rising economy will lead to increased cooperation between Beijing and the South Caucasus states (19).

Azerbaijan

The increasing prominence of the Caucasus in global public opinion in recent years stems from two historical events: the first is the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the second is the terrorist attacks targeting the United States on September 11, 2001. The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the wider and freer circulation of information about the region in the global public sphere and the breaking of Soviet dominance over the region's resources; the second led to a greater need for alternative energy sources in the Middle East, creating the infrastructure for international interest and subsequently international investments.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rich oil and natural gas deposits, particularly in the Caspian Sea region, became the scene of intense interest from international companies and the launch of numerous multi-billion dollar projects. Azerbaijan, located in the Caucasus, stands out as one of the most important potential assets attracting investment in the region due to its oil and gas reserves (20). After gaining its independence, Azerbaijan has been at the center of global and regional developments for two important reasons: its rich oil resources and its geopolitical location. Azerbaijan's geopolitical location between two worlds has led to its energy resources foreign policy being influenced not only by regional and domestic developments but also by global events (21).

The Caucasus is one of the world's first oil-producing regions in the modern sense. Even before the discovery of Middle Eastern oil, Azerbaijan was a significant oil production center. Until 1940, Azerbaijan alone accounted for 70% of the Soviet Union's oil production (22). According to data from the State Oil

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Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR), the fields in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea are estimated to contain 80 billion tons of oil. According to these assessments, the Caspian region's oil reserves constitute 5% of the world's oil reserves, while Azerbaijan's oil reserves constitute approximately 0.7% of the world's oil reserves. According to Azerbaijan's Minister of Energy and Industry, Natic Aliyev, Azerbaijan produced 22.2 million tons of oil in 2005, 30.5 million tons in 2006, 40 million tons in 2007, and 50 million tons in 2008 (23).

On the other hand, Azerbaijan, which has 200 billion m³ of natural gas in its active deposits, has been found to have natural gas reserves of 1 trillion m³ in its "Shah Deniz" field (24). During international negotiations regarding Azerbaijan's energy fields, China, Pakistan, Japan, and India showed close interest at the state and company levels. Energy has played a significant role in developing Azerbaijan's relations with Asian countries. In this context, on June 4, 2003, an \$80 million agreement was signed between China's Sengli oil company and Azerbaijan's SOCAR regarding the Pirsaat oil field. The Chinese government also announced that it could provide support for the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. In line with the general characteristics of Azerbaijan's foreign policy, Azerbaijan-China relations have followed a fluctuating course (25).

For a long time, China viewed Azerbaijan as a transit point for threats directed against it. Although the policies pursued by the Heydar Aliyev administration seem to have changed this to some extent, it cannot be claimed that China's perceptions have completely changed. Based on this foundation, Azerbaijan-China relations have followed an increasing trajectory to this day (26). Indeed, Jia Qingin, Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese Communist Party and Party Secretary of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, who attended the 7th General Assembly of the International Conference of Asian Political Parties (ICAPP), stated that relations between China and Azerbaijan have a long history. Furthermore, Azerbaijani Prime Minister Artur Rasizade

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reported that Azerbaijan-China relations are at a high level and that political and economic relations between the two countries are steadily developing (27).

Armenia

Armenia, or officially the Republic of Armenia, is a landlocked country in the South Caucasus. Formerly a republic within the Soviet Union, it declared its independence in September 1991. It is bordered by Georgia to the north, Azerbaijan to the east, Iran to the south, and Turkey and the Nakhchivan region under Azerbaijani sovereignty to the west. Completely mountainous, Armenia possesses significant natural resources, primarily gold deposits, copper, molybdenum, zinc, and aluminum. Only 17% of its land is suitable for agriculture. Due to drought and frequent earthquakes, Armenia's economy suffers from various difficulties and is worse than that of other countries in the region. High unemployment rates (over 20%) and low wages leading to emigration are major reasons for the very slow economic development. Given the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Azerbaijan and the economic embargo imposed by Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenia's primary source of income is reliance on foreign aid (28).

Following a referendum in September 1991, Armenia declared its independence. That same year, it joined the Commonwealth of Independent States. Demonstrations demanding the annexation of the Nagorno-Karabakh region, inhabited by Armenians, to Armenia strained relations with Azerbaijan. These demonstrations eventually led to war between the two states (29). During the escalating Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, Armenia occupied the Lachin Corridor between Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia, effectively annexing the region. In 1993, Turkey joined the embargo against Armenia. The Nagorno-Karabakh war ended in 1994 with a ceasefire dictated by Russia.

While Armenia maintains close relations with the US and Russia, it also views China as an alternative and has entered into several trade agreements with it. By

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developing relations with China, Armenia seeks to overcome its isolation while simultaneously hoping for support on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Armenia, by openly expressing support for China's "China Only" policy regarding Taiwan and Tibet, is exhibiting behavior that contradicts its own stance on the "right of self-determination of peoples" in its Nagorno-Karabakh policy (30).

Meanwhile, China is also taking steps to improve relations with Armenia. To this end, on April 26, 2000, the Chinese Ambassador to Yerevan, Zhao Shun, met with Armenian Prime Minister Aram Sarkisyan. At this meeting, requests for cooperation between Armenia's Nairit company, which owns the largest rubber and tire production facilities in the CIS, and representatives of China's chemical industry were discussed (31).

In 2009, Beijing surpassed Berlin as Armenia's second-largest trading partner after Russia, with imports from China accounting for 9% and a trade volume reaching approximately \$110 million. Imports from China (\$87 million) dominated bilateral trade, while Armenia saw a more than tenfold increase in exports to China, compared to its primary export partners Germany (16.9%) and Russia (15.9%). China has been pursuing an increasingly active policy to deepen its economic relations with Armenia. In 2011, the trade volume between the two countries reached \$420 million. This year, the target is to reach \$500 million. More than 40 agreements and memorandums have been signed between Armenia and China. Furthermore, there are 41 Chinese-capital enterprises in Armenia (32).

Georgia

Georgia, a federal state, includes the Autonomous Republics of Abkhazia and Adjara, and the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia within its borders. It has an area of 69,700 km², a population of 4,382,100, and its capital is Tbilisi. It is bordered by Turkey and Armenia to the south, Azerbaijan to the east, the Black Sea to the west, and the Russian Federation to the north. Georgia is located in the South Caucasus, on two continents, bordering Europe and Asia. In ancient times,

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many countries sought to conquer Georgia because trade routes connecting East and West passed through it (33). As the only country in the Trans-Caucasus with access to the open sea, Georgia is geopolitically more important than others and holds a key position in the region (34).

To increase the competitiveness of the South Caucasus route, it is necessary to accelerate the Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia Transport Corridor Project (TRACECA) and strengthen partnership agreements between Georgia, the EU, and China. Other means of rehabilitating the Great Silk Road could be the creation of a Caucasus Stability Pact involving Turkey, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (35).

Many of the earliest Chinese ventures in Georgia were directly state-initiated or state-funded. The Oasis Hotel, which opened in the early 1990s, was the first Chinese restaurant in Georgia. The hotel was opened by a man from Xinjiang and financed by the administration of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region. In 1996, six Russian-speaking businessmen were sent to Georgia as part of trade conducted directly through state channels, and a Georgia branch of Heibei, a local import-export company, was opened there. It was believed that there could be a market for consumer goods in a former Soviet country, and the company agreed to export clothing, toys, and even food items. Chinese immigrants in Georgia in the 90s were kept fairly under control. The reason why economic migrants did not attract much attention in Georgia in time is unclear, but it is likely that without any main network of Chinese, the country and its market are less accessible (36).

CONCLUSION

Until the 1970s, China, which had closed itself off from the world, was practically in a state of slumber. Napoleon's words, "There is a sleeping giant. Let him sleep; for when he awakens, he will shake the world," actually summarize this situation. Because, indeed, China, which was dormant first during the dynastic period and then during the communist regime, began to awaken in the 70s with its

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membership in the UN and its booming economy, and today it is among the world's largest economies. In fact, according to many experts, China will surpass the US and become the world's largest economy in the next 20-30 years.

The Caucasus region is a region of great geopolitical importance, acting as a bridge between East and West. The Caucasus, which is an important transit corridor for energy transmission lines, is also a crisis region where conflicts, instability, and global struggles take place. The region, which was largely ignored under the dominance of the Soviet Union, has gained an important place on the world agenda after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The region is also significant because it is a place where global powers clash. Russia seeks to re-establish its former Soviet dominance in the region, while China, seeking to escape the US containment policy, is turning to the Caucasus for alternative transit routes. This is because the US's dominance over Middle Eastern energy resources and its efforts to penetrate Central Asia create a bottleneck for China. While China is forging close relationships with countries in the Caucasus region, Russia is not remaining silent and is attempting to increase its influence to maintain control over the region. However, although the countries in the region are in close contact with Russia, they do not want a return to former Soviet dominance and are therefore seeking alternatives. For example, Armenia has become a NATO member. Azerbaijan has drawn closer to the Atlanticist bloc and has also deepened its relations with China, especially in recent years. Georgia, while still under Russian influence, has opened its country to China and the US commercially, particularly in the aftermath of the 2008 South Ossetia conflict, in an attempt to break away from Russia. All this shows us that as long as China continues its growth, its energy needs will increase. With its growing energy needs, China will expand its sphere of influence and become a significant trading partner for countries worldwide. Countries in the Caucasus will continue to be partners with China and will strive to further deepen their relations.

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