



A Win-Win Relationship between China and Kazakhstan: Thinking Beyond Dependency

Çin ve Kazakistan Arasında Kazan-Kazan İlişkisi: Bağımlılığın Ötesinde Düşünmek

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ABSTRACT

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This article focuses on the economic cooperation between China and Kazakhstan from a win-win perspective. Kazakhstan's geographical location and rich natural resources make it a strategic partner for regional and global actors. Dependency theory is often used to explain asymmetric and unequal relations between developed and developing countries. According to this theory, developing countries become dependent on developed countries, which hinders their economic development. However, it is argued that this traditional theory cannot fully explain China and Kazakhstan's relationship, which is characterized by mutual benefits within a win-win relationship. Economic cooperation between China and Kazakhstan has been analyzed through trade relations, investment flows, and significant infrastructure projects. These activities reinforce not only financial but also political and cultural interactions. China's investments in Kazakhstan and Kazakhstan's multi-vector foreign policy approach reveal a cooperation model that serves the interests of both countries. China's BRI initiative and Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol program are concrete examples of cooperation between the two countries. This article goes beyond the boundaries of traditional dependency theory and offers a new perspective based on mutual benefit and win-win relationships.

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Bu makale Çin ve Kazakistan arasındaki ekonomik ilişkilere kazan-kazan perspektifinden odaklanmaktadır. Kazakistan'ın coğrafi konumu ve zengin doğal kaynakları onu bölgesel ve küresel aktörler için stratejik bir ortak haline getirmektedir. Bağımlılık teorisi genellikle gelişmiş ve gelişmekte olan ülkeler arasındaki eşitsiz ilişkileri açıklamak için kullanılır. Ancak bu makale, bağımlılık teorisinin Çin ve Kazakistan'ın karşılıklı yarar ve kazan-kazan durumlarıyla karakterize edilen ilişkisini tam olarak açıklayamadığını ileri sürmektedir. Bu makalede Çin-Kazakistan ekonomik işbirliği önemli altyapı projeleri üzerinden analiz edilmiştir. Bu faaliyetler bu iki ülkenin sadece ekonomik değil aynı zamanda siyasi ve kültürel etkileşimleri de güçlendirmektedir. Çin'in Kazakistan'daki yatırımları ve Kazakistan'ın çok vektörlü dış politika yaklaşımı, her iki ülkenin de çıkarlarına hizmet eden bir işbirliği modelini ortaya koymaktadır. Çin'in BRI girişimi ve Kazakistan'ın Nurly Zhol programı iki ülke arasındaki işbirliğinin somut örnekleridir. Bu makale bağımlılık teorisinin sınırlarını aşarak karşılıklı fayda ve kazan-kazan ilişkilerine dayalı yeni bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır.

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1. Introduction

This research focuses primarily on China-Kazakhstan relations by introducing briefly their historical ties. In that, this is an attempt to establish a comprehensive understanding of the Kazakhstans's geopolitical dynamics, particularly of China's investments through initiatives like the Belt and Road (BRI)¹ and Kazakhstan's responses to these projects. While dependency theory is commonly utilized to elucidate the unequal relations between developed and developing nations, it is important to thoroughly analyze China-Kazakhstan ties within its distinct socioeconomic and political dynamics. This research consisted of four main parts this part is an introduction to the topic; the second section examines the dependency Theory, Criticisms, and Mutual Benefit Dynamics; the following section is the China-Kazakhstan Economic Cooperation within the Scope of Belt Road and Nurlı Zhol Projects, and the conclusion section highlights findings through of this study, and it offers a significant answer to whether China-Kazakhstan's engagement is dependent or mostly a win-win approach.

The research topic was chosen because dependency theory often suggests that developing countries depend on developed countries, but the case of China-Kazakhstan relations challenges this assumption. It shows that even a relatively developing country like Kazakhstan can establish a mutually beneficial relationship with a global power like China if it follows a decent foreign policy that prioritizes its national interests. This underscores the crucial role of foreign policy in shaping international relations and ensuring that all parties benefit from the relationship.

This research addresses the following question: *"How does the economic cooperation between China and Kazakhstan challenge the traditional dependency theory and exemplify a win-win relationship?"* The argument is that Kazakhstan is not dependent on China but instead engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship. The argument put forward in this research is that the relationship between China and Kazakhstan must be viewed as one of interdependence rather than a one-sided dependency. The economic development of this relationship is rooted in strategic cooperation and mutual interests. China is an important source of investment and trade partner for Kazakhstan, but Kazakhstan also offers China a strategic partnership in terms of energy resources and geographical location. As a result, instead of claiming that Kazakhstan is dependent on China or vice versa, it would be correct to say that this relationship is based on interdependence. A win-win approach should be adopted, in which both sides look out for their mutual interests and benefits. This way, both countries can cooperate to achieve common goals and strengthen their relations.

Until the last decade of the 20th century, Chinese-Kazakh economic ties were non-existent due to the strained relationship between the Soviet Union and China. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, China and the new state of Kazakhstan quickly cemented ties. Kazakhstan's former president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, saw Beijing as an essential ally in modernizing the Kazakh economy and a potential counterweight to Russia's heavy influence on Kazakhstan's foreign and domestic policy. Early meetings with former Chinese presidents, such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, opened the door to a stronger relationship. The leaders resolved long-standing border issues and forged a solid partnership to fight terrorism. With security issues primarily resolved, China could kick investment in Kazakhstan's economy into a higher gear (Goldstein, 2022). From an economic perspective, China and Kazakhstan are long-term partners whose economic relations

¹ In September 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) in Kazakhstan. This initiative's concept is considered China's strategy aims at promoting peace and prosperity through cooperation with countries the Belt (the Silk Road Economic Belt that stretches from western China to Central Asia and Europe) and the Road (the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road that spans from China to Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa) (Leung and Lau, 2021:207). In this research, regarding China and Kazakhstan's relationship, both BRI and SREB are used interchangeably as synonyms for their land ties since Kazakhstan doesn't have to access maritime roads.

have reached a new level of strategic partnership. The post-Soviet history of economic cooperation between Beijing and Astana has shown one of the most significant progress. Since 1991, China has increased its political ties with high-level visits and economic interaction through investments. There is transparent cooperation between China and Kazakhstan in political, strategic, and economic areas (Peyrouse, 2007:8).

China’s path to development was shaped by intense debate during the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s regarding reform and opening up under Deng Xiaoping. Economists who advocated shock therapy-style liberalization struggled with the future of China, along with those who supported gradual marketization, starting from the edges of the economic system. China has set the stage for a significant boom in price reform. Both times, however, it abandoned these reforms (Weber, 2021:1). China has emerged as an economic powerhouse, initially focusing on local poverty alleviation, financial reforms, industry growth, and infrastructure development. The 21st century began when China expanded its activities internationally, exporting its economic character globally. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its regional consequences further strengthened China’s position in neighboring regions. The BRI is the world’s largest economic integrator, with more than 140 countries participating in the project (Masood et al., 2022: 68).

Figure 1: The Khorgos Gateway connects Kazakhstan to China.



Source: South China Morning Post, <https://multimedia.scmp.com/news/china/article/One-Belt-One-Road/khorgos.html>.

Over the past decade, China and Kazakhstan have strengthened their cooperation in various areas such as policy communication, facility connectivity, trade, finance, and people-to-people connectivity. From Kazakhstan’s and China’s perspectives, this has resulted in a mutually beneficial relationship (经济纵横(Economic Perspectives), 2023:1–3). Based on the approaches within the BRI, Central Asia, which is rich in hydrocarbons, has become the crossroads of Eurasia. Kazakhstan has prioritized building relations with neighboring countries and global stakeholders. As a result, the country has emerged as a sovereign state equipped to cope with both internal and external challenges of rapid globalization (Vladimirovich & Aiganym, 2023:74). In addition to China’s economic infrastructure program, Kazakhstan’s Nuryly Zhol (Bright Path)² program is also an essential element in this discussion. Within this framework, China-Kazakhstan’s economic cooperation since 1991 has been characterized by joint ventures, investments, and infrastructure

² This article uses the terms “Nuryly Zhol” and “Bright Path” interchangeably as synonyms.

development. Kazakhstan is altering its strategy for relations with China by adopting a program of economic diversification and moving away from the export of commodities. The dry port of Khorgos (see Figure 1) interlinks Kazakhstan to China by rail. This is a significant gateway regarding the China-Kazakhstan Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and Kazakhstan's Nuryly Zhol projects (Sultangaliyeva, 2016:30–31).

Examining the dependency theory based on the idea that countries receiving foreign aid become dependent on this aid and thus weaken their ability to act independently suggests that the global order is a system in which rich countries extract resources from developing countries (The Economist, 2024). Dependency theory suggests that countries receiving foreign aid or investment may become dependent on foreign aid, compromising their autonomy and ability to act independently. This theory claims that the global economic and political order is structured so that rich or developed countries maintain dominance over poor or undeveloped countries. According to Kabonga (Kabonga, 2017:30), dependency theory highlights that the international system is characterized by asymmetric power dynamics in which rich countries exploit less developed countries' resources, labor, and markets for their interests. This exploitation is facilitated through various mechanisms, such as unequal trade relations, debt burdens, and the activities of multinational companies in developing countries. The following section examines the dependency theory and its criticism and mutual benefit dynamics of the China-Kazakhstan relationship.

2. Dependency Theory, Criticisms, and Mutual Benefit Dynamics

Dependency theory appeared at the end of the 1950s due to the gap between developed and developing states. The economic growth of the rich states did not lead to the development of the developing countries (Ferraro, 2008:58). Hout (1992) states that the dependency theory is an attempt to explain development, underdevelopment, and inequalities in the global economy. Such approaches were developed by neo-Marxist theorists, especially in Latin America, during the 1960s and 1970s. It argues that rich countries' development resulted from destroying underdeveloped countries' economic and social systems through forced integration into global capitalism, meaning that underdevelopment is not a condition but active progress. One could contend that Latin American countries have been stuck in a chain of dependence since colonialism, which core countries have yet to experience; thus, modernization will not work. During the 1960s and 1970s, dependency theory proved to be a successful theoretical approach in international relations, and it gained significant support from scholars worldwide (Hout, 1992:2).

Dependency theory has been used by many economic and political analysts to understand China's relations with other countries in the world. Dependency theory is a concept explored within the field of international relations and focuses on the economic and political dynamics between developed and developing nations. It delves into the influence of affluent countries on those with less wealth, examining the resulting cyclical patterns. In essence, dependency theory posits that underdeveloped nations, relegated to the fringes of the global economy, struggle to progress as long as they are subjugated by wealthier nations at the core (Velasco, 2002:44). In International Political Economy (IPE), competing theoretical perspectives regarding international inequalities and North-South fluidity have emerged. Dependency theory is one such perspective, which appeared in the 1950s due to modernization theory (Matunhu, 2011:68). According to scholars such as Caporaso (1978:13–14) noted that in the late 1960s and 1970s, there was a significant resurgence of interest in issues of dependence, interdependence, asymmetric relations between countries, center-periphery relations, and imperialism. Although it started in Latin American countries, it expanded to Scandinavia, Western Europe, and the USA. He emphasized that the scope of the arguments has been enlarged in other perspectives, too.

According to Duvall (1978: 52), “*dependence*” is frequently used when discussing current international and transnational relations. Part of its ubiquity is due to its voguish use in theories of modern capitalist imperialism, of which the word is a crucial component. Indeed, the term dependency, or dependence theory, is mainly attributed to Third World scholars who are critical of some of the alleged implications of established capitalist metropolises’ global dominance, and it denotes an integral part of imperialism theory. The concept of dependency is prevalent among academics who critique developed capitalism and is also commonly used by social scientists within capitalist societies. Such a situation is because these scholars are trying to understand imperialism theories. Still, it’s also due to increased awareness of issues in developed countries, like their reliance on petroleum from other regions and the financial interdependence among major capitalist economies (Duvall, 1978).

Fajardo (2022: 1) defines the dependency theory as the argument that the global capitalist system leads developing countries to continue to depend on developed countries through unequal economic relations. In the long run, developing countries become backward and unable to achieve independent economic development.

Duvall (1978) argued that at least three academic traditions could be identified in which the term dependence is frequently used concerning foreign or transnational relations. Each of these traditions is founded on a unique approach to knowledge. In this way, each provides a unique “*language*” for analyzing dependency. First are dependency theorists, most of them particularly Latin Americans. However, scholars’ geographical and national origin is not the distinguishing aspect of dependency theory. Instead, it is a set of questions that distinguish tradition, a perspective on these questions, and an orientation that accompanies knowledge about them. Second, North American academics almost universally portray dependency theory as a theory about the relationship between dependency and development, which is an unfortunate and misleading portrayal (Duvall, 1978:54–58).

The dependency theory is the product of a specific place and historical period. Latin American intellectuals, generally achieved political independence after the Second World War, became extremely sensitive to realizing their continent’s backwardness (Sanchez, 2003:37). Dependence theory, mainly associated with countries in Latin America, holds that in a capitalist system, resources tend to move from the periphery, an underdeveloped, poorer state, to the wealthy core of the Western world. Such a situation is that developing countries, the periphery, tend to provide natural resources and cheap labor for products designed and sold by businesses in developed countries; this could result in a unilateral capital flow supported by politics and finance. The three main pillars are education, culture, and, occasionally, the military. Dependency theory highlights the international system as one where all states serve the economic interests of the core states. Dependency scholars need to operationalize the term itself. For instance, “*dependence*” and “*dependent*” are mostly considered synonymously. However, at some point, theorists distinguish dependency as the lack of a state’s autonomy over its economic development aims, while dependence means reliance on others (Caporaso, 1978:19).

Dependency theorists oppose the idea that industrialization via economic collaboration between developing and developed countries could close the gap between the developed and developing worlds. They argue that based on the example of Latin American countries, dependency theorists insist that such collaborative enterprises result in the economic dependence of the developing state on developed countries (Fajardo, 2022:13).

Cheng and Zhai (2021) state that a significant argument of the dependency theory is that peripheral countries, due to their lack of capital and key technologies, were left with no option but to rely on exporting raw materials and energy sources in their trade with central countries. This perpetual dependence on central countries inevitably led to their domination and exploitation of the peripheral countries (Cheng and Zhai, 2021:6).

Some scholars, such as Ateş et al. (2005), divide the dependency theory by employing three leading arguments on developing and developing states. To begin with, developing underdeveloped and developing countries require dependence on the core countries of the West, in stark contrast to the development of wealthy Western countries. Second, when the influence of the core (developed) countries and the economic relations with these countries are weaker in the peripheral (developing) countries, it is observed that these peripheral countries have a higher potential to grow their economies. Such an argument is that when peripheral countries reduce their external dependence or eliminate the pressures of the central countries, they can achieve their economic development more sustainably. Third, after the core countries have recovered from their recession, they attempt to incorporate periphery countries into the global capitalist economy (Ateş et al., 2005:259). Regarding China and Kazakhstan's relationship, such assumptions are invalid, so the two countries have a win-win relationship that aims to develop together and increase collaboration, mainly on economic issues and political and security agreements.

Dependency theory further gained a vital place worldwide during the 1970s; on the other hand, it became a subject of many criticisms. Giovanni E. Reyes argues that the dependency theory perspective cannot explain precisely exhaustive confirmations to support its findings. His further criticism is that the dependence perspective regards relations with transnational companies as only harmful to countries when these ties can be used to pass technology. In this regard, it is critical to consider that the USA was once a colony with the potential to break the cycle of underdevelopment (Reyes, 2001:115).

Like any other theoretical approach to social science study, dependency theory has been criticized. Defenders of free-market economics criticize dependency theory because it fails to consider internal factors in a country's development and attributes accusations entirely to external factors (Agbebi & Virtanen, 2017:434). Another point of criticism has been that it focuses too much attention on the role of external ties and relationships, ignoring the complexities of internal conflict in the second line of criticism. Although dependency scholars contribute to understanding the causes of several levels of economic development at some point, they do not further the research objective of this research, which does investigate the level of economic growth in China and Kazakhstan.

Dependency theory has been argued since the 1960s. Scholars and theorists' primary goal is to explain the reason for the global South's dependent status in international systems, particularly from an economic perspective. According to Young Namkoong, critics take various positions since no shared dependence theory exists. The criticism of the dependency approach can be categorized into two main groups: liberalist critics and non-dependency Marxist critics (Namkoong, 1999:141). For instance, some scholars such as Smith (1979: 248) argues that dependency theory was a fundamental misunderstanding of the leading causes of the underdevelopment of third-world countries' internal factors rather than external, meaning claims that the insistence on the construction of the global system. Smith argues that the primary fallacy of the dependency school lies in its assertion that the root causes of underdevelopment in Third World nations are not domestic in nature but rather stem from external factors, such as the structure of the international system.

Sanjaya Lall (1975) challenges the theory by arguing that dependency is circularly interpreted, suggesting that developing nations are considered developing simply because they are dependent. Lall also contends that since it's challenging to define dependence clearly, it cannot be proven to be causally connected to the perpetuation of underdevelopment. Lall summarized that dependency is anticipated when a commonly used term is given a particular connotation and unusual characteristics; there has been some confusion about what '*dependence*' entails. A country can be defined as '*dependent*' on foreign trade or foreign technology in standard economic terms, or the

environment is becoming more interdependent as a result of increased foreign trade and investment, or a mechanism of great complexity can be said to entail greater 'interdependence' between various staff. In such definitions, nothing is undesirable for any country; the other way around, most economists would define interdependence as an excellent and beneficial thing for all sides. On the other hand, dependence is used by the dependency school to characterize specific characteristics such as economic, social, and political aspects of the economy and trace specific processes causally linked to its underdevelopment and are expected to harm its future development (Lall, 1975:799–808).

Since there is no single theory of dependence, there is criticism from both the left and right. Dependency theory's most significant flaw is its inability to understand the causes of underdevelopment. Put another way, the relationship between underdevelopment and dependence is explained in a circle. Moreover, every theoretical approach to social science research has its critics. Undeniably, dependency theory provided a new lens through which to view the realities of IPE development and underdevelopment. This viewpoint was mainly concentrated on the issue of underdevelopment in Third World states and the central question of who controls development. Furthermore, the dependency approach sought to explore the structure of the global economy (Namkoong, 1999:145).

Dos Santos further emphasized that the concept of the dependency theory allows people to understand the domestic situation of these states as part of the global economy. Yet China has aimed to develop together. He further pointed out that since dependent accumulation is inextricably connected to the international economy, it is highly influenced by the unequal and combined nature of international capitalist economic relations, the imperialist centers' technical and financial power, the realities of the balance of payments, the state's economic policies (Santos, 1970:235).

Previous studies have shown that despite the financial crisis of 2008, "*global inequality has decreased markedly since 2000*", mainly due to the steady growth of Asian economies, especially in countries such as China and India (Farny, 2016). However, Bourguignon also outlines that inequality is rising within the individual states even as inequality has decreased among the countries. Bourguignon (2016) emphasizes the importance of all countries collaborating to address inequality within their borders and, at the very least, halt its continued escalation. In conclusion, he contends that evaluating inequality on a local scale, rather than a global one, aligns with the dependency paradigm given the ongoing underdevelopment of the periphery amidst a worldwide decrease in inequality (Bourguignon, 2016:15).

Bourguignon (Bourguignon, 2016:13–15) assumes that international inequality will likely decline as developing-world economies converge with developed-world economies. Such assumptions undermine first-dependency scholars' attempts to divide the periphery from the center to lessen global inequality. However, even within the dependent school of thought, there has been a shift in viewpoint on this topic. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the ascendancy of neoliberalism and globalization contributed to significant transformations in the international system. Dependency theory suggested that the most effective method to escape the cycle of dependence and address global inequality was for peripheral countries to detach from the central powers. However, after the post-Cold War, it witnessed increased integration rather than separation, indicating that breaking away from core countries was not viable for peripheral nations. These developments have challenged the assumptions of dependency theorists who advocated isolating the periphery from the center as a solution to asymmetrical dependence and inequality.

In conclusion, by the 1980s and through the 90s, dependency theory could not explain underdevelopment, so both theories were at an impasse. Even though, at some point, the dependency theory could explain significant differences in situations in developing countries, neoliberalism has replaced it. Although dependency academics add to the understanding of the reasons for several

degrees of financial growth, they do not contribute to the aim of the study. A dependency-guided examination of China's economic clout in Kazakhstan might provide perplexing conclusions and suggest measures that worsen the circumstances that allow Kazakhstan's reliance on China because dependency researchers see integration into the international capitalist system as a significant impediment to financial progress. They know an escape strategy as a viable alternative, such as more nationalization and government economic engagement.

Regardless of the critiques of dependency theory, it is difficult to contradict that it provided a fresh viewpoint on the realities of IPE and raised awareness of the global South's underdevelopment status (Agbebi & Virtanen, 2017:435). However, China and Kazakhstan's relationship cannot take from dependence since they are supposed to gain together. For instance, in 1997, Li Peng pointed out that China had no option but to cooperate efficiently with foreign governments and energy companies to acquire energy needs outside of China and maintain a stable market (Burles, 1999:23). Mutual benefits include economic growth, infrastructure development, and job creation; for example, China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) started operating in Kazakhstan in 1997 after three years of negotiations. Soon, other major Chinese companies followed suit. Also that year, China and Kazakhstan signed an agreement to construct a nearly 4,800 km pipeline that connects the Caspian Sea and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwestern China (Rousseau, 2013:44).

Some scholars (Bali and Arora, 2023) have effectively applied the dependency theory to the economic ties between China and Central Asian countries, particularly Kazakhstan. Their work demonstrates how these countries' economic resources, such as oil and natural gas, are predominantly exported to China, creating a significant economic dependence. The authors believe that the importance of this dependence lies in the challenge it poses to the long-term development of Central Asian countries. These countries need more industrial infrastructure, which puts them at a disadvantage in the global market, and they must keep their dependence on core countries, thus limiting their ability to develop independently (Bali and Arora, 2023:412–25).

The next section examines China-Kazakhstan's economic cooperation within criteria determined not only by the dependency theory but also by other approaches, such as the win-win theory within the scope of China's BRI and Kazakhstan's Nurl Zhol projects because the dependency theory is not capable of conducting such an analysis.

3. China-Kazakhstan Economic Cooperation within the Scope of Belt & Road and Nurl Zhol Projects

Former Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Kazakhstan in December 2014 for the 13th Prime Minister's meeting of the SCO. During the visit, he met with his Kazakh counterpart and signed 30 cooperative agreements worth \$10 billion between Beijing and Astana. The trade volume between the two sides has snowballed yearly by 20 percent, with Kazakhstan becoming China's second-largest trade partner in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The BRI has taken a crucial role in their collaboration, with both countries focusing on improving interconnectivity with highways, ports, trains, oil and gas pipelines, and air routes (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014).

The cooperation in energy between Beijing and Astana further promotes the expansion of bilateral trade volume and injects new vitality into deepening economic and trade cooperation. China and Kazakhstan can enhance their competitiveness in the international market and achieve great economic and trade development potential (Guo & Xu, 2008:23). China-Kazakh relations were discussed during a meeting between Li Keqiang, former China's Premier, and Karim Massimov, former Kazakhstan Prime Minister, on December 14, 2014. The Chinese government is committed to promoting peace, stability, and development in Central Asia. It emphasized the need for China

and Kazakhstan to expand their pragmatic cooperation beyond the energy sector and core cities. The former Premier suggested exploring potential collaboration in new energy, intensive resource processing, equipment manufacturing, and agriculture to generate more value and vigor in bilateral cooperation. Both sides agreed to deepen their ties and cooperate in policy. This meeting was deemed significant in advancing bilateral cooperation in the interest of both countries (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2014a).

China and Kazakhstan are interested in more cooperation in the processing industry. The Chinese-Kazakh investment and development forum was held in Astana on January 29, 2015, with both countries discussing plans for collaboration in the processing industry. Around 300 people from the two countries' business communities, governmental organizations, and national firms attended the event. Wang Xiaotao, Deputy Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission, represented China, while Minister for Investment and Development Asset Issekeshov represented the Kazakh side. The two sides discussed over 20 projects and the potential for launching cooperative projects in Kazakhstan to establish new manufacturing sectors and 100 business activities. Detailed agreements were signed in March 2015, and most began implementation that year (The State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2015).

These agreements are essential in strengthening the comprehensive partnership between China and Kazakhstan. They have the potential to foster greater cooperation across various sectors, which will bring mutual benefits, strengthen both countries, and enhance regional stability.

China's investment in Kazakhstan is increasing, which is a positive indicator of economic growth. Despite specific investment barriers, such as changes in regulations and policies, Chinese-funded enterprises can still effectively navigate and utilize Kazakhstan's investment dispute resolution mechanism to protect their legitimate investment rights and interests (Wang & Wang, 2013:113–114). In March 2015, Beijing and Astana governments signed 33 cooperation deals worth \$23.6 billion during Kazakhstan's former Prime Minister Karim Massimov's visit to Beijing. The agreements covered fields such as steel, non-ferrous metals, oil refining, and automobile. Former Premier Li Keqiang witnessed the signing, and he emphasized that the deal's success demonstrates that the two countries' economies are complementary. The prime ministers of the two sides agreed on a capacity cooperation framework agreement worth \$18 billion during his visit to Kazakhstan at the end of 2014. Li Keqiang praised Kazakhstan's commitment to cooperation and encouraged both countries to be innovative and take market demand as a guide while strengthening the coordination of policymaking. Kazakhstan's former Prime Minister, Massimov, expressed his desire to improve the inclusion of strategic partnerships with Beijing and enhance exchanges and cooperation in various areas (The State Council; The People's Republic of China, 2015a).

On August 25, 2015, China and Kazakhstan agreed to improve policy coordination to increase trade and connectivity. The commitment was made at a meeting of the Beijing-Astana Cooperation Committee. Zhang Gaoli, Vice-Premier, pointed out that the cooperation committee was essential in facilitating the development of China-Kazakhstan relations. Both sides were willing to sign an agreement on investment cooperation and push bilateral trade to \$40 billion as soon as possible. Kazakhstan aims to work closely with China to maintain a high-quality, comprehensive strategic partnership (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2015b).

Table 1 presents the breakdown of foreign trade from China to Kazakhstan between 2016 to 2022. In 2016, the table observed a balanced exchange between China and Kazakhstan, with exports from China amounting to \$8.29 billion and imports from Kazakhstan at \$4.81 billion. The total foreign trade volume was \$13.10 billion, reflecting trade relations' mutual benefits and cooperation. In 2017, exports were \$11.56 billion, imports were \$6.38 billion, and total foreign trade was \$17.98 billion. In 2018, exports amounted to \$11.35 billion, imports to \$8.53 billion, and total foreign trade to \$ 19.88 billion. In 2019, exports were \$12.73 billion, imports were \$9.27 billion, and total foreign trade was \$22 billion. In 2020, exports were \$11.70B, imports were \$9.8 billion,

and total foreign trade was \$ 21.51 billion. In 2021, exports amounted to \$13.96 billion, imports to \$11.29 billion, and total foreign trade to \$25.25 billion. In 2022, exports were \$16.25 billion, imports were \$14.84 billion, and total foreign trade was \$31.09 billion. This table shows the growth of trade relations between Beijing and Astana and the changing trade volume. There has been a significant increase in the volume of trade, especially in recent years.

Table 1: International Trade China to Kazakhstan (USD)

Years	Exports	Imports	Foreign Trade Volume
2016	\$8.29 billion	\$4.81 billion	\$13.10 billion
2017	\$11.56 billion	\$6.38 billion	\$17.98 billion
2018	\$11.35 billion	\$8.53 billion	\$19.88 billion
2019	\$12.73 billion	\$9.27 billion	\$22.00 billion
2020	\$11.70 billion	\$9.81 billion	\$21.51 billion
2021	\$13.96 billion	\$11.29 billion	\$25.25 billion
2022	\$16.25 billion	\$14.84 billion	\$31.09 billion

Source: National Bureau of Statistics of China, ([https://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/yearbook/.](https://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/yearbook/))

The win-win cooperation has become increasingly important in international relations. As countries seek to protect and expand their interests, the traditional approach based on competition through wars, colonization, and the division of spheres of influence has become less effective. Instead, the emphasis has shifted towards building cooperative relationships that benefit all parties involved. This approach, commonly called win-win cooperation, is gaining traction as a more sustainable and effective way to achieve mutual benefit and promote lasting peace, particularly in the economic sphere (Zongze, 2016:8–11).

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in China’s BRI and Kazakhstan’s Nurly Zhol program from their cooperation and win-win perspective. Yang Jiechi, a retired Chinese diplomat and politician, argued that China is committed to building new international relations based on win-win collaboration rooted in five thousand years of Chinese civilization and that China represents the continuation and development of Chinese society. This vision is significant in embodying ancient Chinese values such as harmony without uniformity, inclusiveness, harmonious coexistence, and the pursuit of universal peace (Jiechi, 2015:14–15). Kazakhstan is attractive to China because it offers several natural resources necessary for China’s growing economy and energy needs. For instance, Kazakhstan’s rich aluminum, oil, and gas deposits are significant for a bilateral relationship with China. In addition to such factors, as a Central Asian country, Kazakhstan is potentially a large market for Chinese commodities and products, and transportation possibilities exist to connect with European markets (Galyamova, 2008:310).

From Kazakhstan’s perspective, on May 22, 2012, the 25th session of Kazakhstan’s Council of Foreign Investors was held. At the meeting, Nursultan Nazarbayev, former Kazakh President, said, *“Today, I propose jointly launching the ‘New Silk Road,’ a large-scale project. Kazakhstan will recover its historical role and become the largest business and transit center of the Central Asian region, simultaneously becoming a unique bridge between Asia and Europe.”* Such a proposal foresaw the importance of infrastructure development projects in the east-west direction, which shows the significance of Kazakhstan’s cooperation and coordination with its eastern neighbor China on transportation issues. China and Kazakhstan have built close cooperation on different infrastructure issues, such as transport and energy, and some significant infrastructure projects connecting the two countries were launched before the BRI was announced. Therefore, it is not surprising that Astana approved the BRI from the very beginning: Xi’s proposal fits perfectly with the perception that Kazakhstan is a crucial point of the modern Silk Road and with the government of Kazakhstan’s consistent efforts to update the domestic transport infrastructure and successfully integrate it into international transport systems (Bitabarova, 2018:161).

The BRI, initially called One Belt, One Road (OBOR), was launched in 2013. China's President Xi Jinping declared its two components on different dates. In September, in Kazakhstan, he called for the '*Silk Road Economic Belt*' connecting China to Europe via Central Asia. In October, he announced the '*Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road*' in Indonesia, reaching Europe via the Indian Ocean. Through this initiative, Chinese financial institutions have provided an estimated \$600 billion in loans and aid, in addition to facilitating or encouraging trade and investment flows under the BRI banner (Calabrese et al., 2024:5).

The BRI represents a significant decision by the Party Central Committee of China. It aims to establish a new pattern of comprehensive opening up and contribute to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. This initiative holds immense historical significance and plays a unique role in developing the BRI. It encompasses cultural, trade, and legal aspects and is crucial for enhancing the legal framework of the BRI and fostering mutually beneficial collaboration between China and Central Asia (Tian & Ma, 2020:1-3). Furthermore, China does not seek to impose political or economic responsibilities with the BRI. Instead, China encourages developing countries to become self-sufficient by pursuing economic development goals. China aims to promote the countries concerned to engage in mutual development cooperation. China seeks to do all this within the framework of a policy of mutual non-interference, which means non-interference in each other's internal affairs and mutual gain from the principle of win-win cooperation and peaceful coexistence (Yildirimçakar, 2019:221).

Kazakhstan launched its economic development program called Nurly Zhol in 2014, which is similar in scope but smaller in scale. This self-developed economic development plan shows the impact of China's rising economic interaction on the country by improving bilateral economic ties. Nurly Zhol project aims to benefit from Kazakhstan's strategic geography through renewed investments in transportation infrastructure. Kazakhstan's significant historical importance as a crucial point along the Silk Road has inspired leaders from both China and Kazakhstan to focus on positioning the country to take advantage of the growing trade opportunities across the Eurasian landmass. The Kazakh government has confirmed advancements in the reconstruction of road networks linking Western China and Europe. According to the official Kazakh sources, under the Nurly Zhol initiative, the road networks connecting Western China to Europe have been rebuilt and improved. Nurly Zhol's development program includes cooperation in bilateral projects in China-Kazakhstan and is inspired by the infrastructure-centered development model, which is synonymous with China's economic rise (Goldstein, 2022).

Since the beginning of the 2000s, China has been trying to establish intergovernmental communication and regional mechanisms in Central Asia, especially with Kazakhstan. Generally, the most senior Chinese politicians have been continuously appointed to manage these individual cooperation committees with Central Asia. The backgrounds of these Chinese politicians, most of the party members who have continued under former President Hu Jintao's leadership, reflect the serious commitment of the Chinese Communist Party at the highest level to ensuring China's economic interaction in the region, especially from Kazakhstan (Yan, 2017:45).

Kazakhstan's location and natural resources make it a vital partner in China's BRI, and its Nurly Zhol program aims to modernize and diversify the economy. With China's assistance, Kazakhstan has developed its infrastructure, including a railway connecting China and Europe via Kazakhstan. The contributions of Huan Zhang and Akbar Mazhit to promoting Kazakh literature in China will further strengthen the relationship between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

Concerning the bilateral relations between Beijing and Astana, Zhang Gaoli, former Vice Premier, arrived in Astana on June 24, 2015, to carry out the significant agreement reached by the high-level officials of Beijing and Astana to deepen collaboration and establish more effective ways. Following Xi Jinping's visit in May to Kazakhstan, which was a very effective and productive state

visit, the two leaders agreed to advance the alignment of their national financial development strategies. Furthermore, Zhang Gaoli's visit came at a time when bilateral relations between the two countries had entered a new development phase. China's President first raised the issue regarding how to increase the effectiveness of the infrastructures under the BRI during his visit to Astana in 2013. During their meeting in 2015, President Xi Jinping and former President Nursultan Nazarbayev agreed to participate in the initiative with Kazakhstan's "*Bright Path*" economic strategy and how they can interface these two road projects (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2015c).

Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Kazakh Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev in Beijing on November 22, 2018. They discussed aligning China's BRI with Kazakhstan's Nurly Zhol economic program. President Xi Jinping also warmly greeted Kazakhstan's current President. Cooperation under the BRI has brought tangible benefits to people along the route, giving the global economy fresh energy. President Xi Jinping encouraged both countries to improve policy coordination and integrate the SREB building with Kazakhstan's Bright Path economic strategy. Former Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev described China as Kazakhstan's friendly neighbor and strategic partner. The program is relevant to enhancing regional connections and fostering progress and prosperity. Kazakhstan hopes for continued cooperation with China (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2018).

China to deepen capacity cooperation with Kazakhstan. China and Kazakhstan have strong political mutual trust and practical collaboration. China is eager to strengthen the connections between Kazakhstan's Bright Road initiative and its BRI. Both countries are taking initiatives to advance the partnership between their small and medium-sized businesses, advance cross-border transit, and promote the sharing of production capacity. Kazakhstan hopes to strengthen cooperation with China in the infrastructure for transportation, nuclear energy, and deep processing of agricultural products (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2017).

Beijing and Astana have established a permanent comprehensive strategic partnership, strengthening their diplomatic relations after over 30 years. The two nations have stimulated mutual trade, strengthened transit, transport, and logistics cooperation, and resumed human resource exchanges and passenger flights. The visit of Wang Yi, State Councilor and Foreign Minister of China, to Kazakhstan provided further impetus to the strengthening of partnership and mutually beneficial cooperation between China and Kazakhstan in bilateral and multilateral formats. The parties discussed bilateral, political, economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation prospects within international organizations and forums. The growing economic interactions between the two countries are expected to benefit both countries through increased investments and trade opportunities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2020).

China and Kazakhstan mutually build logistics centers to improve the railway and boost shipping transportation. China and Kazakhstan jointly built a logistics center in the eastern Chinese port of Lianyungang to boost railway and shipping transportation. The logistics terminal specializes in cross-border trans-shipment and warehousing operations and has an annual processing capacity of 410,000 containers. The terminal has helped increase exports and imports from nations connected by the New Eurasia Continental Bridge. The Kazakhstani National Railway Corporation and the Chinese city of Lianyungang invested more than 600 million yuan in the terminal, which comprises a 220,000 square-meter container yard (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2017a).

A new cargo train service was inaugurated on September 30, 2017, connecting Taiyuan, the capital of North China's Shanxi province, to Kazakhstan's Pavlodar. The service, which covers a

distance of 3705 kilometers, saw its first train depart from Zhongding Logistics Park carrying 41 containers. The introduction of this route aimed to reduce delivery times to just seven days significantly. Notably, this marks the initiation of the first cargo train service from Shanxi to Central Asia (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2017b).

The state visit of President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan to China has been seen as a milestone in strengthening the economic ties between the two nations. The visit resulted in the signing of 47 investment-related agreements worth \$22 billion, which included a deal between China's Sinopec and Kazakh oil and gas company KazMunayGaz to invest in a polyethylene plant in Kazakhstan. The two sides agreed to deepen cooperation in various sectors, including economy, trade, investment, agriculture, automobile manufacturing, and energy. The establishment of the Kazakhstan logistics center in Xian's dry port and the opening of Kazakhstan's consulate general in Xian are significant steps towards further enhancing the economic relationship between China and Kazakhstan (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2023).

China and Kazakhstan agree to enhance pragmatic cooperation. China and Kazakhstan have pledged to strengthen their bilateral cooperation with a focus on production capacity. The two countries have been working closely to develop their practical cooperation, and former Premier Li Keqiang has expressed his satisfaction with the early results. He has also invited Kazakhstan to facilitate travel between the two countries to improve business cooperation. Meanwhile, former Prime Minister Bakytzhan Sagintayev has praised the collaboration between the two nations' production capacities, which he believes plays a role in boosting bilateral relations. Kazakhstan is committed to fostering favorable conditions for their continued cooperation and advancing practical cooperation between the two nations (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2017c).

Beijing and Astana are set to enhance cooperation across multiple areas and strengthen their bilateral relationship. Both countries aimed to expand cooperation in various fields during a meeting between Han Zheng, Vice-Premier, and Alikhan Smailov, Kazakhstan's First Deputy Prime Minister. The China-Kazakhstan Cooperation Committee, an intergovernmental body responsible for planning and organizing bilateral cooperation, has played a key role in improving collaboration in development strategies, trade, investment, financial cooperation, industrial cooperation, security, energy, technology, environmental protection, and mining. The two nations want to reinforce their industrial capacity, transportation, agriculture, and power partnership. Kazakhstan is eager to work closely with the Beijing government to promote trade, finance, energy, agriculture, transportation, logistics, and infrastructure cooperation for the mutual benefit of both nations (The State Council The People's Republic of China, 2019).

The recent meeting between the Foreign Ministers of Kazakhstan and China underscored the readiness and commitment of both parties to strengthen their bilateral relationship. The leaders engaged in comprehensive discussions on political, trade, economic, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation issues, highlighting the potential for fruitful collaboration. The Chinese Foreign Minister reaffirmed that bilateral relations with Kazakhstan are a priority for China's diplomacy, expressing a strong willingness to work hand in hand with Kazakhstan to promote cooperation in all areas. The two sides also explored strategies to enhance political and economic cooperation, increase bilateral trade, protect mutual investments, and support collaboration in the water and energy sector. The Kazakh Foreign Minister reiterated the importance of mutual trust and respect in deepening the strategic partnership between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2021).

Kazakhstan is crucial for China in managing its relationships with major countries and regional multilateral ties. Strengthening China-Kazakhstan relations brings practical benefits and strategic significance to their economic growth. In the long term, establishing a new strategic foundation is essential to guiding and shaping the development of these relations (Shen, 2006:42-43). The strategic partnership between China and Kazakhstan has been strengthened by a

comprehensive range of political, trade, economic, investment, and cultural cooperation. The bilateral trade turnover increased by over 30% in 2023, amounting to \$41 billion, with China becoming the largest trading partner of Kazakhstan. The two countries promote joint economic, transport, and logistics projects, especially under the BRI. Interregional cooperation, interdepartmental interaction, and human exchanges have intensified with the mutual visa-free regime. The Chinese government is always ready to enhance cooperation for the benefit of the people of both countries. Kazakhstan's non-primary exports to China are expected to increase, and new approaches in the joint development of industrial, investment, and energy cooperation are stressed. Kazakhstan's tourism industry will likely benefit from the Year of Kazakhstan's Tourism in China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev emphasized in his speech at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences the historical and cultural ties between China and Kazakhstan, highlighting the similarities in their development paths. From an economic perspective, he stresses the importance of further strengthening the country's economic potential, economic independence, and possible economic collaborations with China and human capital development. Kazakhstan is committed to fully implementing the modernization program to become one of the thirty most developed countries worldwide. The President hoped that the ideas and suggestions of experts from both sides would strengthen mutually beneficial cooperation between the two nations. President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev highlighted the strong and growing ties between China and Kazakhstan, particularly in trade, economic, transport, logistics, and investment cooperation. He noted that China was among the first countries to recognize Kazakhstan's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and provided appropriate guarantees without preconditions. The two countries share a common position in the fight against religious extremism, separatism, and terrorism. (Official website of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2019).

Kazakhstan draws attention to the long-term strategic importance of China's presence in the oil sector. The Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline has shrunk Kazakhstan's dependence on former Soviet pipelines, through which most of its oil exports still flow. Such a pipeline provides direct access to the global economy and aligns with the ever-expanding oil consumption (Marten, 2012). Furthermore, establishing a livestock product technology innovation platform between China and Kazakhstan showcases a robust partnership between the two countries. This platform has fostered joint research and development in animal product safety testing technology, quality standards, and the exchange of standards and animal product samples. This collaborative effort holds significant potential for advancing the livestock industries of both nations and strengthening their economic ties (Liao, 2014:278). Local business groups were also worried about trade regulations becoming more restrictive regarding technology transfer. Due to this circumstance, Kazakhstan's exports to China may be restricted, and regional players may be less inclined to consider new economic ventures. The year 2012 was the pinnacle in trade volume between the two nations. Subsequently, the export value decreased by 32% in 2013 and 44% in 2014 and 2015; declining oil prices may explain this reduction (Tjia, 2022:815).

In a significant development, China and Kazakhstan have bolstered their ties with five crucial agreements in the last quarter of 2023 in Beijing. The first is The Memorandum of Understanding between China's State Development and Reform Committee and the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reform of Kazakhstan for exchange and cooperation in economic development. The second is the agreement between the governments of China and Kazakhstan on developing the Trans-Caspian international transit routes, including trains between China and Europe. The third is between the State Committee for Development and Reform of China and the Ministry of Transport of Kazakhstan on the joint development cooperation of the Tasheng-Ayagoz railway construction project. The fourth is between the governments of China and Kazakhstan regarding the development of the

Trans-Caspian international route. The last is a protocol between the General Administration of Customs of China and the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan on phytosanitary requirements for exporting rapeseed from Kazakhstan to China (Akorda.kz, 2023).

Kazakhstan has adopted a multi-vector foreign policy to sustain and diversify its independent sovereignty identity (Vanderhill et al., 2020:975–993). Thanks to multi-vector policy, a balance has been achieved among global powers. This situation contributes to the relationship with China, reducing dependence on Russia and other international actors. Kazakhstan oscillates between balancing and alliance building between significant actors, including Russia, China, the USA, and the European Union (EU), to minimize losses and maximize gains to preserve its identity and autonomy (Tjia, 2022:799). Kazakhstan also remained tightly linked to Russia in the post-Soviet era due to energy supply lines, national security, and the role of Russian technicians in the Kazakh economy. Besides, former President Nursultan Nazarbayev also sought closer ties with the West. Kazakhstan's economy began to edge ahead of its Central Asian neighbors in the 1990s, thanks to the discovery of huge new oil reserves and subsequent international investment. Nursultan Nazarbayev maintained solid control of Kazakhstan's political and economic policy from his initial election in 1991 to 2019, when he retired, dismissing all prospective political challengers, including four prime ministers. In 1995, a new constitution was passed that significantly increased presidential power. Following the cancellation of the 1996 presidential election, Nazarbayev won a landslide victory in a 1999 election that drew worldwide condemnation (Country Profile: Kazakhstan, 2006:2).

As the conclusion of this section, while the dependency theory demonstrates that developed countries are taking advantage of developing countries, it fails to capture the dynamics of China-Kazakhstan relations. China's BRI and its economic interaction with Kazakhstan demonstrate that Astana is not merely a passive recipient of economic domination but actively participates in this bilateral relationship. Given Kazakhstan's strategic place as a Central Asian hub, as seen in the BRI routes, it serves its development objectives, establishing a significant relationship that transcends traditional narratives.

4. Conclusion

This research determines whether observing the China-Kazakhstan interactions solely through the lens of Kazakhstan's dependence on China oversimplifies the situation. While the Astana government does benefit significantly from China's investments and trade, it also plays a crucial role in supporting China's geopolitical goals by maintaining a solid position in Central Asia and Eurasia. This complexity emphasizes the mutual benefits and the depth of the Beijing-Astana relationship. It's crucial to recognize that China's relationship with Kazakhstan is not solely about energy resources. Kazakhstan holds a strategic position as an energy supplier and a key transition country for China's BRI. This strategic significance highlights China's reliance on Kazakhstan for energy, regional security, and economic stability in Central Asia.

Within the framework of dependency theory, developing countries often become dependent parties when they pursue economic relations with developed countries. However, this research discussed the bilateral relationship between China and Kazakhstan. It pointed out that this relationship is more likely to be a mutually beneficial "*win-win*" situation rather than a relevant dependency. In particular, analyzing the closeness of bilateral relations and the growth of trade volume in the context of China-Kazakhstan, China's promotion of the BRI and Kazakhstan's active promotion and integration of the "Bright Path" plan prove that this relationship is consistent with the "*win-win*" characteristics. In other words, the dependency theory is not fully applicable in this case. The relationship between China and Kazakhstan is an example of both sides benefiting from it rather than relying on it unilaterally.

One of the key findings to develop from this research is that the relationship between China and Kazakhstan transcends traditional theories of dependence, unveiling a dynamic partnership rooted in mutual economic interests, strategic cooperation, and diplomatic ties. China's regional strategic interests and Kazakhstan's multi-vector policy have fostered a relationship characterized by mutual benefits and shared objectives. The strategic partnership between China and Kazakhstan is poised to be increasingly influential in shaping the region's future. This future holds promise and potential.

The current findings add substantially to our understanding that, given its intricacy, the China-Kazakhstan relationship defies a simplistic application of traditional dependency theory. While this theory does offer some insights into international economic relations, it needs to capture the subtleties of this dynamic partnership. A meticulous analysis of economic cooperation since 1991 reveals that Kazakhstan is not merely dependent on China but is engaged in a mutually beneficial relationship. Kazakhstan's strategic importance shapes the unique partnership between the two countries in Central Asia, the multi-vector policy, and broader regional dynamics. As Central Asia remains a crucial player in global geopolitics, comprehending the nuanced dynamics of China-Kazakhstan relations becomes increasingly urgent. A comprehensive approach is imperative to acknowledge the mutual benefits and cooperation between these two countries, leading to a deeper understanding of international economic relations in the region.

Central Asia is at the crossroads of global geopolitics, and Kazakhstan occupies an essential position as the region's largest and most economically developed country. The China-Kazakhstan relationship has attracted considerable attention in recent years due to its strategic, economic, and geopolitical implications. While traditional theories of international relations may predict a deceptive relationship between the two countries, a deeper analysis reveals a dynamic characterized by cooperation and strategic interests. This research explores the multifaceted dimensions of China-Kazakhstan relations and highlights nuances that challenge traditional theories such as dependency theory.

Consequently, dependency does not lend itself as a positivist research methodology in the context of growing China's economic cooperation in Kazakhstan. Instead, this research draws on the dependence theory that a win-win approach has replaced. Dependency theory corresponds to the leftist policies associated with the Cold War, but win-win theory became the primary approach to understanding current international relations after its end. The increasing ties between Beijing and Astana have been accompanied by intense scrutiny. Several interests from the development agencies, academia, the media, the Western government, local Kazakhstan governments, and media have expressed positive and negative attitudes about China's ongoing presence and influence in Kazakhstan as a Central Asian country.

This article has thrown up many questions that need further investigation. Further work needs to be done to establish whether, as in the China-Kazakhstan relationship and the other four Central Asian countries are dependent on China, they have also had a win-win relationship.

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