

**Japan's Foreign Policy towards the South Caucasus States:  
Policy of *Low Profile and High Purpose* in the Region of Multilayered Interests**  
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The aim of this thesis is twofold. The primary goal of the research is to conceptualize motives, decisive factors and limits of Japan's decision-making process concerning its policy towards the South Caucasus (SC) - a region where the Russian and Western interests collide. Secondly, the thesis contributes to regional study and conceptual discourse over international politics of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, three SC states with drastically diverse foreign policy agendas.

The SC represents a region where interests of such powers as Russia, EU, U.S., Turkey, Iran, and recently China overlap creating an extremely complicated international structure. To a large extent, and due to its complex political geography, the SC has hitherto been discussed through the lens of geopolitical interests. However, a rigorous analysis of each actor's policies and behavior patterns revealed that their interests are multidimensional and strikingly distinct from one another. The juxtaposition of these interests point to the prevalence of a complex, multi-stakeholder environment, which I labeled as a *structure of multilayered interests*. The concept of *multilayered interests* explains the patterns of stakeholder interests and their perceptions, which are crucially important for understanding the rationale for and impact of Japanese interests in the region.

Academic research of Japan's policy towards the South Caucasus region is underdeveloped. Geographical remoteness is likely the reason why researchers have shied away from a deeper scrutiny of the subject. Importantly, a better grasp of Tokyo's engagement in the SC gives valuable insights into Japan's positioning in the region, where Russia's geopolitical interests encounter the West's increasing presence, paving the way for the emergence of the so-called *New Cold War*. Japan's relations with these actors directly influence its SC policy, delineating Tokyo's decision-making limits. Design of Japan's foreign policy in the SC has dramatically diminished political element both on bilateral and multilateral levels. It is mainly based on the depoliticized Official Development Assistance. We labeled Tokyo's approach to the SC as a policy of *low profile and high purpose*, through which Japan seeks to advance its *high* political, economic and humanitarian objectives, while retaining a *low profile*. The approach of *low profile* can be broken down into three dimensions: (1) *low posture* - eschewing a pro-active policy stance over problematic international matters and challenges, (2) *low interference* - eschewing a pro-active policy over internal issues, such as democracy, rule of law, civil liberties and even environmental protection, (3) *low risk* - minimizing risks that may compromise its bilateral, regional and wider multilateral interests.

The thesis draws on a comparative case study of Japan's policy to the three SC republics and examines its merits and disadvantages in the context of a highly volatile international environment. The analysis led to the following conclusions. By developing and implementing the above-mentioned policy of *low profile*, Japan has managed to minimize risks that could jeopardize its diplomatic, economic and humanitarian objectives both on multilateral and bilateral levels. However, the policy limits Japan's potential for taking a leadership role in the region. At the same time, it utterly undermines the purposes of the announced forth pillar of Japanese diplomacy, i.e. value based diplomacy as described in *the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity*.

Basing on the findings of the conducted research on Japan's foreign policy towards the SC, the thesis argues that Japan possesses extensive trust credit and unexploited political capital in the entire region, sandwiched between powerful vying actors, which crates a potential for Tokyo to make a major move towards globalization of its foreign policy and fill the regional vacuum, generated by the absence of power acknowledged by each local player.