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Kazakhstani Public Opinion Toward China: Understanding the Divide

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Kazakhstani Public Opinion Toward China

UNDERSTANDING THE DIVIDE

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Abstract: Kazakh Public Opinion toward China

This paper argues that favorable opinions toward China in Kazakhstan are the product of Chinese investment into Kazakhstan, primarily through the recent Belt and Road Initiative, homophily, and xenophobia. Homophily and xenophobia in Kazakhstan have not been studied earlier, and this research uses data from surveys conducted by the Institute for Comparative Social Research (CESSI) in 2015, which were coded and analyzed using multiple regression analysis to investigate its impact on public opinion in Kazakhstan toward China. This study suggests that favorable opinions toward China in Kazakhstan are most closely correlated with the variables of age, Kazakh ethnicity, and location in a rural area. Further research is needed to determine the long-term impacts of the Belt and Road Initiative.

I. Introduction

On the 26th of December 1991, the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) irrevocably changed the global political landscape. Fifteen territories that once comprised the Soviet Union were deemed independent territories. This collapse of the USSR shook the international political sphere and created ramifications still felt today. Immediately following the dissolution, former Soviet republics scrambled to set up governments and manage the numerous ethnicities contained within their arbitrarily drawn borders.

As the Soviet Union spanned nearly nine million square miles, the fallout left nearly three-hundred million people in political uncertainty. In the aftermath of the collapse, citizens from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belorussia (now known as Belarus), Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan were left with an ambiguous future. Most territories were left economically and politically dependent on Russia; though, for some, the loosening grips of the Soviet Union allowed for emerging and independent governments to blossom (Congressional Research Service, 1996). Moreover, the form of national identities, rather than purely Soviet identities, began to grow.

Nations such as Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan set up political institutions and relatively independent governments prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, thus lessening the impact of its dissolution.¹ Thus, the union republics have been compared to “statelets in embryo, with complete institutions of government” (Cummings, 2012). For Kazakhstan and similar emerging

¹ Kazakhstan declared sovereignty nearly a year prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union on October 25th, 1990. Following their declaration of sovereignty, Kazakhstan declared independence on December 16th, 1991, ten days before the USSR officially collapsed (Congressional Research Service, 1996).

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powers, the legacy of imperialism and competing political influences marred an otherwise nomadic history. To Kazakhstan, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was not, necessarily, an easy transition. However, it was yet another phase in history for a region that has long dealt with the ebb and flow of imposing political actors.

The territory now known as Kazakhstan, the largest region in Central Asia, began as a sparsely populated geographic area situated between present-day Russia and China. Kazakhstan was first invaded by Turkic conquerors, then Mongolian invaders led by Genghis Khan in the 13th century (Cummings, 2012). The Mongolian invasion led to the establishment of the Kazakh Khanate territories and blossoming trading cities along the Great Silk Road. As such, Kazakhs “were caught between different conquests; namely the Mongolian empire and the Turks” (Congressional Research Service, 1996). As a result of internal divisions and conflicting tribal tensions, Kazakhstan descended into a period of war. Nearly two centuries continued in political disarray until the various Kazakh tribes united under the ruler Khan Kasym, an endeared Kazakh leader (Karimkhan, 2013). Khan Kasym separated the warring tribes into three hordes – the Great, Middle, and Lesser – and assigned occupation to different areas within the territory. These divisions satisfied each faction due to their improved territorial control, but created geographic vulnerabilities within the larger Kazakh region.

Russia exploited these regional divisions and began to seize territory in the 17th century. However, Russia was not the only foreign entity who desired control of Kazakh territory. China also vied for territorial power by challenging the Lesser Horde; as a result, the Lesser Horde sought Russian protection for temporary assistance. This cede to Russian influence quickly transitioned from temporary protection into Russian occupation, allowing the Russian military

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to secure control from the Aral Sea to the Ural River in Kazakhstan. Gradually, Kazakhstan was subsumed into the Russian Empire, first as an autonomous republic then as a Soviet Socialist Republic in 1936 (Congressional Research Service, 1996).

Throughout the period of uncertainty in the 17th century and during the time of Soviet control, China and Kazakhstan developed a complex relationship. Though China was viewed with caution due to their initial territorial grabs, it also served as an area of refuge during Stalin's aggressive push towards agricultural collectivization in the 1930s (Congressional Research Service, 1996). The Sino-Soviet relationship deepened into the 1990s, and since Kazakhstan's independence, China has sought a closer relationship with the country. Astana has carefully balanced their position as an ally of both Russia and China in recent years, though Moscow still plays a central role in many Chinese-Kazakh agreements (Serikkaliyeva, Amirbek, & Batmaz, 2018). China's early interactions with Kazakhstan has led to a deepening bilateral relationship, but the question of what individual-level factors account for Kazakh favorable opinions towards China is more complex than the countries' shared history. One critical aspect of the Sino-Kazakh relationship is the impact of Chinese investment flows into Kazakhstan, from initial railway development in the 1990s to the present One Belt One Road initiative.²

The One Belt One Road initiative is a dynamic policy announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013 at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan. The initiative has ambitious plans to build transportation and infrastructure across parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe. China maintains a central role in this process, often as the managers of local development and as the

² The One Belt One Road Initiative is also referred to as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), 1BR, OBOR, and the New Silk Road/New Silk Road Economic Belt.

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overarching central authority. The geostrategic goals of the program are debated, with some analysts arguing that China and the Belt and Road Initiative, “seek to reinforce the emerging global narrative that China is moving to the center of global economic activity, strength, and influence” (Johnson, 2016). However, the Belt and Road Initiative has been successfully publicized across Central Asia. According to a report published by the Council on Foreign Relations (2019), the sixty countries that have joined China’s Belt and Road Initiative account for two-thirds of the world’s population. Furthermore, Morgan Stanley estimated that overall expenses of the Belt and Road Initiative could hit between \$1.2 to \$1.3 trillion by 2027 (Chatzky & McBride, 2019). The massive amounts of money flowing into Central Asia and elsewhere have garnered the attention of world leaders in the East and West; and while Western pundits tend to generally be skeptical, countries that stand to benefit are more optimistic.

The most recent President of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbayev, has been one of the optimistic supporters of the Belt and Road Initiative since early on in its inception. He has touted the idea across Kazakhstan and shaped foreign and financial policies around deepening Chinese investment. Speaking of the Belt and Road Initiative in 2017, Nazarbayev expressed that “the idea of creating a single economic space of ‘Great Eurasia’ gives a sense of purpose, as the Silk Road Economic Belt can advantageously link the platforms of the SCO, the EEU (Eurasian Economic Union), and the European Union into a single regional prosperity area” (Nazarbayev, 2017). China’s goals to bring together much of Eastern, Central, and Southern Asia focus on improving infrastructure, especially by developing new transportation networks; goals that are especially lucrative to Kazakhstan’s national agenda. Though Nazarbayev and his Chinese counterpart Xi joined together early on during the Belt and Road premiere in 2013, the

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fact that Belt and Road was built into Kazakhstan's country plan exemplifies how deeply rooted Chinese involvement is in Kazakhstan.

In a report by the National Bank of Kazakhstan (2017), analysts reported that "Chinese investors are anticipated to provide more than \$250 billion to fund infrastructure projects in the Asia region, with Kazakhstan being one of the primary beneficiaries." Though, the report later notes that Chinese investment in Kazakh infrastructure had only reached approximately \$1 billion by September 2017. However, it seems that Kazakhstan has been willing to allow for occasionally sluggish Chinese investment flows due to the nature of Chinese the foreign aid. Chinese foreign aid varies from Western definitions of foreign aid because China is not a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Therefore, the way that foreign aid is funneled to other countries for developmental assistance does not abide by OECD's Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) guidelines of foreign aid. DAC regulations have been criticized for donors' conditions of aid, often including policy incentives and sanctions, and the exploitation of recipient circumstances (Tian, 2018). Academic Hao Tian of the Central Asian Project writes that China's foreign aid policies: "Often fall between development loans and foreign investment... the Chinese prefer to talk about cooperation that involves a win-win situation, referring to their economic programs as *development assistance*."

The reasons why China is intent on strengthening the trade relationship and the Belt and Road Initiative into Kazakhstan may reach deeper than purely improving diplomatic relations though "development assistance". Statistics from the World Integrated Trade Solution of the World Bank show that China has remained the second largest trading partner to Kazakhstan behind Italy since 2013. Further, although trade decreased between 2013-2016,

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trade improved from 2016-2017 once again. These figures are reflected in Table 1 of the Appendix. Moreover, the primary export of Kazakhstan in 2017 was oil and mineral fuels, which accounted for over \$30 billion (USD) of exports. Industrial machinery worth \$4.7 billion (USD) was imported at higher rates than any other product; this signals Kazakhstan's reliance on other countries to provide resources that continue to assist in development.

Though China's focus on improving soft diplomacy has been a priority of President Xi's agenda, the benefit China reaps from successful implementation of the Belt and Road strategy has far-reaching implications. The foremost benefit to China and Kazakhstan coming from the Belt and Road Initiative is in the decreased transportation costs, a critical factor in international trade. The Belt and Road Initiative clearly shows the impact of reduced transportation costs in action. The World Bank found that shipping times between the China-Central Asia-West Asia region will decline by as much as 12% due to the improvements in transport infrastructure. Furthermore, the decrease in trade costs for the Belt and Road economies will range between 1.5 to 2.8 percent (World Bank, 2018). Thus, China's aim to improve trade with Central Asia by combatting a central deficiency, poor transportation infrastructure, aids in Kazakhstan's foreign policy goals while improving bilateral trade immensely.

China's lucrative offer of foreign aid that is not tied to political favors but still benefits international trade has resonated well with many Central Asian governments. On the surface, it appears that Chinese "development assistance" is a policy of no strings attached. However, deeper analysis indicates that compliance with the Belt and Road Initiative may require adhering countries to support various aspects of Chinese foreign policy and participating in a

deal that significantly benefits China.³ Yet, the prospects of formidable economic payoffs for Kazakhstan seem to have enticed local politicians. Just because Kazakh leaders have shown interest in the Belt and Road Initiative, though, does not directly translate to favorable opinions trickling down to average citizens. It seems unlikely that investment in Kazakhstan is the only factor driving favorable opinions toward China. Public opinions appear to be more complex than the bilateral relationship the two countries enjoy, although familiarity with China has undoubtedly increased since Belt and Road launched.

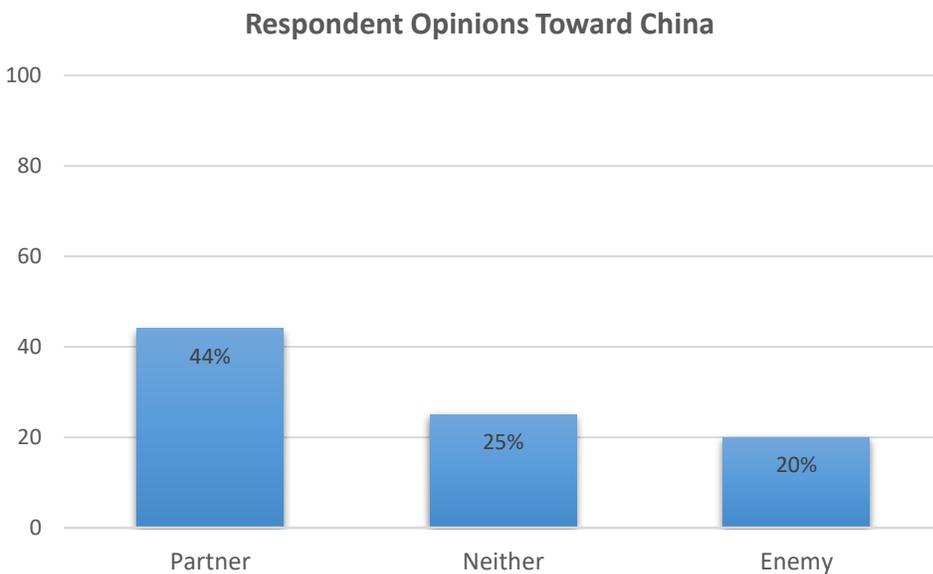
While Kazakhstan began as a nomadic state, it transitioned to a warring ground for invaders and then a region vulnerable to vying political entities in search of territory and influence. Kazakhstan is an important case study of how international powers are viewed in post-Soviet territories that retain close ties with Russia. Studying Kazakhstani public perception of global actors, such as China, the United States, and Russia, allows for a deeper understanding into influence campaigns and provides valuable insight into “The New Great Game” played in Central Asia (Cooley, 2012). Understanding public opinion in Kazakhstan allows policymakers worldwide to determine the effectiveness of diplomacy and investment. Perhaps most importantly, understanding Kazakhstani public opinion data may reveal factors that international governments will have a much harder time overcoming: individual opinions based on unchangeable factors.

II. Dependent Variable

³ This case is especially evident in the case of Uighurs in China, where socio-political and human rights issues have created a charged environment between China and Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev stepped back politically from the mass internments as the Belt and Road Initiative has progressed.

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This research aims to present an analysis of public opinion towards China in Kazakhstan through the lens of CESSI survey data, theorize the motivations for favorable opinions towards China, and conclude with recommendations of possible avenues for further research and investigation. Using publicly available survey data and reports commissioned for the U.S. Department of State, the objective of this research is to answer the central question of which individual-level factors account for Kazakhstani citizens having favorable opinions towards China.



Survey data reveals that approximately 44% of Kazakhstani citizens view China as a partner, which signals a general tendency to view China positively; although, a significant percentage (20%) view China as an enemy (Kaltenthaler, 2015).⁴ While favorable opinions toward China are more than twice as high as unfavorable opinions, the distribution of responses also indicate relatively pervasive apathy and even concern toward China. The variance shown by the

⁴ The respondent opinion percentages were taken from the survey data collected by CESSI Moscow. The percentages are out of 2,000 survey respondents.

distribution of respondent answers encouraged multiple factors to be explored based on existing literature and prior theory.

III. Theory and hypothesis

Three bodies of theoretical literature may account for the variance in the dependent variable. The first is the existing work on homophily, or the tendency for humans to have higher levels of trust and interaction with those who are similar to them. The second is the literature surrounding xenophobia and prejudice between differing age groups. The final relevant body of knowledge is that of utilitarianism, or the philosophical concept of maximizing gains and minimizing losses.

Homophily

One factor that may partially explain why ethnic Kazakhs are more likely to hold favorable opinions toward China is due to homophily. As McPherson (2001) succinctly wrote, “similarity breeds connection.” Homophily is the tendency to be sympathetic, attracted to, or otherwise seek out others who are similar to oneself. Research has found strong association patterns of homophily in race and ethnicity, most notably through an empirical study by McPherson (1987). McPherson (1987) that found face-to-face groups have significant effects on tie formation in social networks.⁵ Though these patterns have not been extensively studied in

⁵ Tie formations examine how various factors influence relationships.

Central Asia, the idea that ethnic Kazakhs are more favorable towards China partially because of homophily is plausible.

McCroskey et al. (1974) found that homophily is a multi-dimensional construct that can involve perceived opinions about social attitudes, values, appearance, and background. This reveals that homophily can be shaped by understandings of similarity, though it is not always the case. McCroskey's research is further supported by individual-level analysis conducted in 2013 by Kristina McDonald. McDonald et al. led a study on adolescent friendships and found that same-race friendships were more common than cross-race friendships, and that same-race friends mirrored each other on all markers of socio-behavioral characteristics.

Taking into account McPherson (1987), McCroskey (1974), and McDonald (2013), the literature suggests that race or ethnic identification plays a significant role in determining which groups are viewed as similar based on phenotypical traits. As many ethnic Kazakhs today are descendants of Mongolian and Chinese migrants who settled in Hordes thousands of years ago, various phenotypical similarities are still present (Congressional Research Service, 2018). This may partially motivate Kazakh feelings of homophily toward Chinese populations.

Prejudice and Xenophobia

Research on Kazakh opinions towards China show that “[China] is increasingly attractive to younger generations, who display interest in following China’s developments” (Laruelle, 2018). However, it is difficult to disentangle whether Chinese soft diplomacy is affecting opinions towards China or if general prejudice and xenophobia among older populations plays a larger role.

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Stewart et al. (2009) found that older adults tend to express greater levels of prejudice than younger adults. His study explored conflicting literature on whether adults express more prejudice because they were socialized in more prejudiced time (Hasher et al, 1999) or because they have greater difficulty inhibiting pre-existing stereotypes (von Hippel, 2000). The results suggested that older populations have less cerebral control to suppress verbal and non-verbal expressions of prejudice. As Stewart's 2009 study suggested that age differences in prejudice may be related to age-related deficiencies in inhibitory ability, this literature may illuminate why certain demographics may contribute to variation in the dependent variable. If older respondents have even slight forms of brain atrophy, which is common in aging populations, their willingness to voice prejudice may manifest in higher levels than in younger participants.⁶ These findings were applicable to the survey research because respondents were from diverse age groups, spanning eighteen to over ninety years old.

The applicability of Stewart's study is restricted because his sample was taken from a small sample of one hundred and twelve Americans, the majority of whom were white. The historical differences between race-relations in America and Central Asia are significant, and therefore the study is limited in scope. However, Stewart's study read with Franssen (2012) may produce a more comprehensive explanation for Kazakhstani attitudes. Franssen measured the relationship between age and right-wing attitudes and age and ethnic prejudice in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. The study was much larger, with eight-hundred participants, and reinforced the positive correlation between age and prejudice. Further, the study did not find that older respondents who were raised in less tolerant environments only adhered to old-

⁶ Atrophy is shrinkage of the brain resulting in decline of cognitive abilities.

fashioned prejudices (Franssen, 2012). Though this study acknowledged the need to track racial prejudices through the course of one's life, the results nevertheless indicate a deeper trend among older populations to express prejudice.

While cognitive decline may contribute to expressed prejudices in older respondents, Hjerm (2001) found that age as an explanatory variable may be tied with other factors, such as education. Hjerm explored xenophobia, nationalism, and education in Australia, Canada, Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Sweden, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.⁷ The results of this study found that nationalist sentiment manifested most clearly and at higher levels in the oldest age group (Hjerm, 2001). As older populations are less likely to be educated than younger populations, Hjerm found education to be the dominant explanatory variable when examining xenophobic patterns. Hjerm's empirical case study revealed that xenophobia diminished with increased levels of education and that xenophobia varied widely depending on the country in point. Another finding of his study was that elderly respondents from the Netherlands and Hungary were consistently more xenophobic. The results of Hjerm's study give rise to questions about varying education levels among elderly respondents and how these patterns could manifest in a larger-scale dataset.

While differing levels of xenophobia among Kazakhs may have influenced the varying relationships, the role of Chinese education in Kazakhstan could also exacerbate this variation. Confucius Institutes are one educational tool used in Chinese soft diplomacy that appear to have been successful in Kazakhstan. Confucius Institutes are educational centers of Chinese

⁷ Xenophobia, in this paper, refers to: negative attitudes towards, or fear of, individuals or groups of individuals who are in some sense different (real or imagined) from oneself, or the groups one belongs to. (Hjerm, 2001, Pp. 43)

culture often affiliated with universities at low-to-no cost. Confucius Institutes allow Chinese culture and language to spread among young people, and there are currently five active Institutes in Kazakhstan (Confucius Institute Headquarters, 2019). Due to Sino-Kazakh relations at the governmental level, the pervasiveness of Chinese language and availability of study abroad programs have also spread significantly over the previous three decades. According to the China Scholarship Council, Kazakh citizens studying in China have increased more than fivefold in the previous ten years to 12,000 students (Institute of International Education, 2019). While it is difficult to measure the precise role that Confucius Institutes and the mobility to study abroad have had in increasing interest among younger generations, the exposure to Chinese culture among younger generations is undoubtedly increasing. Thus, not only is it likely that differences in general attitudes based on age, but also on education, impact how China is viewed in Kazakhstan.

Utilitarianism and Trade

The third body of literature, utilitarianism, is the basic notion of maximizing benefit and minimizing loss. Utilitarianism in trade and individual-level decision making may help researchers understand what motivates favorable opinions toward China. If Kazakhstani respondents felt that China has overall improved Kazakhstan, or has at least not worsened it, this may factor into generally positive opinions towards China. Because the Belt and Road Initiative has permeated even remote regions of Kazakhstan, the benefits of bilateral trade through reduced transportation costs may also impact respondent opinions.

Transportation costs result in low-cost exporting nations to produce less, consume more, and export less due to focus on meeting internal demand (Carbaugh, 2015).

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Transportation costs, overall, reduce the volume of trade and extent to which a country can specialize in the production of a good, therefore reducing the total gains available for bilateral trade. Though Kazakhstan's "specialized goods" primarily consist of petroleum and minerals (together accounting for over half of total exports in 2017), the cost of exporting these goods would significantly decrease with improved means of transportation. As Tajik scholar Safovudin Jaborov noted (2018, p. 38), "For China, easier trade with Central Asia means decreasing transportation costs for both the export of its final products and for the import of minerals and energy resources." According to Carbaugh (2015), goods are traded when the cost of transportation between various nations is less than the pre-trade difference of the relative commodity prices of goods. Improving transportation networks across Central Asia has further alleviated trade burdens for China and will lead to unprecedented reductions in overall trade costs.

The nature of Chinese development aid is a key point of Kazakhstan's regional involvement, and the idea that public opinions are influenced by foreign assistance is evidenced by previous studies. Andrabi and Das (2010) found that exposure to foreign aid in Pakistan had a lasting and statistically significant impact on perceptions of foreigners. However, this study focused on foreign assistance in the aftermath of the 2005 earthquake and focused on opinions of earthquake victims. While the aid and development assistance Kazakhstan receives has not generally been related to natural disasters, localized populations have witnessed the direct effects of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Further, Goldsmith et al. (2014) argued that in order to raise public opinion in a recipient country, aid has to be visible, effective, targeted, and provided on a sustained basis.

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Chinese involvement in Kazakhstan dates back to the early days of Kazakh independence, when assistance came in the form of railway development (Congressional Research Agency, 1996). The railway and infrastructure networks then, as well as now, have been highly visible to rural areas of Kazakhstan and have been relatively sustained since 2013. This suggests that respondents who are familiar with Chinese investment in Kazakhstan, or have witnessed these projects firsthand, may be more likely to hold favorable opinions of China. However, research on the impact of foreign aid, trade, and public opinion has been limited. Most of the existing literature is on a country-by-country basis, and the Belt and Road Initiative is still fairly early on in its overall implementation. Therefore, reduced transportation costs as well as Chinese development aid may account for positive opinions toward China.

Public opinion data, especially that on opinions of global actors, is severely limited in Kazakhstan. Thus, while country-specific empirical studies are useful in developing theories, there have not been substantial case studies conducted in Kazakhstan on general public opinion to include in this research. Thus, notions of homophily, xenophobia, and utilitarianism are critical grounds for developing a framework for what may drive opinions of global actors.

The Research

The dependent variable of the project, opinions toward China in Kazakhstan, was operationalized by the survey question: *Please tell me whether you consider the country a partner of Kazakhstan, an enemy of Kazakhstan, or neither. – C. China.* The research question that motivated the project sought to address what individual-level factors account for Kazakh favorable opinions towards China. This paper argues that identification with Kazakh

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ethnicity and location in a rural area contribute to higher levels of favorability towards China, while age corresponds to lower levels of favorability toward of China. Ten independent variables were selected to test in the ordered probit regression.

The model also included the control variable gender. Gender was used as a control instead of an independent variable because it lacked theoretical priors of how it would be linked to the dependent variable. An ordered probit regression analysis statistical approach was used to test the hypothesis. Ordered probit regression was useful in determining statistical relationships when the dependent variable is categorical and has more than two, but less than five, response options.

As the literature indicated that higher ages tend to positively correlate with xenophobia, this trend was expected to present itself in the data. In regions where Chinese investment has blossomed through the Belt and Road Initiative, higher levels of favorability toward China were predicted; thus, region, geography, and rural/urban location were tested for positive correlation. Similarly, higher levels of satisfaction and social trust in Kazakhstan were hypothesized to correspond with higher favorability toward China. This is because higher levels of satisfaction and social trust demonstrate relative faith in the Kazakh government and society; therefore, individuals with these characteristics may not fall victim to Sino-phobia and support governmental involvement with the Belt and Road Initiative.

Initially, stronger identification with an ethnicity was predicted to interact negatively with the dependent variable, as nationalism has increased in recent years and this narrative often employs a Kazakh-first approach (Laruelle, 2018). Those who were dissatisfied with the economy were predicted to be less likely to view China favorably because of the recent

investment into Kazakhstan. The Kazakh government has publicized how Chinese investment will improve Kazakhstan economically, and exposure to this narrative may influence how people view Chinese economic involvement in Kazakhstan. Unemployed respondents were hypothesized to view China unfavorably due to xenophobia; further, unemployment rates are higher among older populations (Axelrad et al. 2018), and this relationship was predicted to be statistically significant.

IV. Data & Methods

In order to investigate Kazakhstani public opinion, a representative sample of Kazakh citizens ranging from ages 18-101 was taken. The survey consisted of 2,000 respondents and was conducted by CESSI Moscow in 2015 with the aim of understanding public opinion on several key issues in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The survey asked respondents to identify demographic factors about their experiences and beliefs as well as questions on domestic and international affairs. Some of the issues in question regarded political awareness, economic security, and perceived regional threats. CESSI Moscow, otherwise known as the Institute for Comparative Social Research, is a public opinion research organization based in Moscow, Russia. CESSI conducts public opinion and marketing research in both Russian and post-Soviet countries, and frequently collaborates with the U.S. government.

The survey collection in Kazakhstan took place from May to June 2015. Interviews were held in Almaty, Astana, Chymkent, Karaganda, Aktobe, and Taraz. Researchers designed the sample to be representative, and therefore excluded members from “military bases, penal communities, and other institutionalized populations” (Kaltenthaler, 2015). Respondents were interviewed in a face-to-face fashion in Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Tajik, and Russian languages. The

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questionnaire used during the interviews was developed in English by Dr. Kaltenthaler, Dr. McMann, and U.S. officials from posts in Astana and Almaty.

In order to limit bias in the survey, certain aspects of the project were withheld from respondents.⁸ The sample design employed multistage area probability sampling, a variation of cluster sampling. Multistage sampling occurs when clusters of the population are divided into smaller groups (or clusters) in several stages. This is done to make data collection more manageable (Dudovskiy, 2018). The sampling stages first took place in municipalities and rural communities, then electoral districts and randomly selected starting points, then households, and finally with individual respondents (Kaltenthaler, 2015).

The sampling plan was divided into five sections, starting with the stratification of the country and ending with interviewee selection. The first method of the sampling plan was to stratify Kazakhstan into five geographical zones that comprised different regions of the country. Then, PSUs (municipalities and rural communities) within each of the five geographical zones were selected with probabilities proportionate to the adult population size (Kaltenthaler, 2015). The third step was to select electoral districts as starting points within the PSUs. Next, the random route method selected households within an electoral district.⁹ Finally, the Kish selection grid allowed random selection of respondents within each household.¹⁰ After this step, the interviewer listed members of the household that were aged over 18, from oldest to

⁸ For example, discourse over the funding of the project (by the USG) and involvement of the Russian firm conducting the survey (CESSI) was limited.

⁹ Random route method is when the interviewer “follows a set random procedure for contacting households/individuals in a sample, beginning with a set starting point within the designated PSU” (Holdings, 2014).

¹⁰ Kish selection grid, or the Kish grid, assigns a table of random numbers to select members within a household to be interviewed (Kumar, 2014).

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youngest, and divided by gender. Those individuals over 18 years old within the household were listed, the data was recorded, and the interviewee was selected by standard Kish rules. The selected individual was the sole respondent from the household, and call-backs were conducted with each respondent. This sampling method, as well as the research and design plan, allowed for diversity of respondents in age and geographical location.

A quantitative approach was used to conduct analysis on public opinion in Kazakhstan. Survey participant responses were coded numerically to explain individual opinions toward China. Coding this otherwise qualitative data allowed for substantive analysis to take place on a very specific section of the respondents. If a respondent did not answer their opinion towards China, their responses were removed in the process of data cleaning. Therefore, coding the responses alleviated the process of data cleaning and allowed for clarity of results.

The variables were first coded in a binary fashion where possible or assigned a scale-score for cases in which binary coding was not possible. After coding the data, variables were analyzed using multiple-variable regression analysis. Significance levels were determined using an ordered probit regression, a model that estimates relationships between an ordinal dependent variable and several independent variables (Cameron, 2005). The z-score identified levels of significance, and significant variables reflected a score of $\geq .05$. With the dependent variable of question 37A (whether China is considered a partner, enemy, or neither), certain independent variables consistently proved significant. The independent variables that consistently showed significance were: Rural ($Z < 0.0001$), Kazakh ($Z < 0.0001$), and Age ($Z < 0.0001$).

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The dependent variable and independent variables revealed varying relationships, but each of the significant variables had positive relationships with the independent variable. This demonstrates that individuals living in rural areas tended to view China as a partner, rather than an enemy. This relationship also suggested that those who identified themselves as the Kazakh ethnicity tended to hold positive opinions towards China. The only variable that deviated from this trend was age. The relationship between age and opinions towards China demonstrated that older individuals tended to be less favorable towards China.

After establishing which variables showed initial significance using the z-score, first difference testing was employed. First differences determine the marginal effects of the independent variables and show the relative predictive power (Kaltenthaler, 2015). First difference analysis was performed on each of the explanatory variables of the model. By calculating the marginal effect in this manner, the magnitude of the impacts of independent variables on the dependent variables could be determined. The independent variables that showed relative predictive power to the dependent variable in question were age, identification with Kazakh ethnicity, and whether the respondent lived in a rural or urban area.

Several limitations that came with using the z-score to determine relationships between variables were eliminated after running the first-difference analysis. However, certain limitations on the scope of the dataset remained. As the general survey included a multitude of issues and was not only on opinions towards China, some of the independent variables yielded counterintuitive results and nine variables did not display significance. Furthermore, another limitation was that the survey was conducted in 2015, so it was not possible to track opinions

over time or to conduct significant follow-up with respondents. Finally, in an ideal setting, research could be conducted personally and in-country.

V. Results

The results of the first differences estimation show that age is the most predictive variable of holding a favorable opinion towards China. In this case, age is the most powerful explanatory variable used in the model, with a first difference value of 0.18. Thus, when all other variables are controlled, older respondents show a pattern of being less likely to have favorable opinions towards China.

The second most powerful explanatory value was identification with Kazakh ethnicity. When a respondent identified with the Kazakh ethnicity, the first difference value was 0.17. This tells us that if all other variables are controlled for and we move a respondent from minimum to maximum values on being ethnically Kazakh, they are 17% more likely to view China as a partner.

The final value that showed significance in the first difference analysis was the variable rural, which showed the weakest significance, but revealed that respondents in rural areas were 10% more likely to view China as a partner. Thus, the hypothesis that older respondents would express less favorable opinions toward China was supported by the first difference analysis. The hypothesis that stronger identification with an ethnicity would be inversely correlated with favorable opinions toward China, however, was refuted. Kazakh ethnic identification had the second strongest predictive power and positively correlated with the

dependent variable. Finally, the only location-related variable that proved to be a weakly predictive variable was location in a rural area. Therefore, the hypothesis that regions where Chinese financiers have heavily invested would hold favorable opinions toward China was also supported.

The results show that age, identification with Kazakh ethnicity, and location in a rural area are the most powerful predictors of favorable opinions toward China. The supporting literature provided insight into why this may be the case. For example, xenophobia and prejudice is more likely to manifest in elderly respondents, which likely influences why older respondents are less likely to view China favorably. Homophily may factor into why a large percentage of the population holds favorable opinions, as well as tangible benefits from trade utilitarianism.

VI. Conclusion

This study intended to explore public opinion in Kazakhstan, an under-researched topic that lends insight into how individuals view powerful international actors. Using research from economics, psychology, political literature, and philosophy, the study argued that Kazakhs likely hold favorable opinions toward China for various psychological and economic reasons. As China continues to expand relationships in Kazakhstan and elsewhere, implications as such are highly valuable to understanding how to approach bilateral relationships.

The research results indicated that when determining favorability towards China, variables of age, rural location, and identification with the Kazakh ethnicity are all significant variables to consider. Further research indicates that several underlying reasons may motivate these responses, such as homophily, xenophobia, and tangible Chinese investment. While these

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measures are imprecise, they offer a unique viewpoint into ordinary sentiments toward perceptions of China in member country of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The topic of attitudes toward China in Kazakhstan revealed interesting trends and yielded results that were not initially considered. For future analysis, expanding the research to include an examination of Kazakhstani media sources and portrayal of the Chinese through oral tradition may be useful to better understand relationships through time. If the survey is replicated again, a cross-comparative analysis between the results from 2015 and when the Belt and Road Initiative is more complete may indicate China's success using soft diplomacy.

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Appendix

Table 1

Trade Relationship between Kazakhstan and China
2013 - 2017

Year	Total Import/Export Value (USD\$bn)	% Change
2017	5778	+ 37%
2016	4215	- 23.08%
2015	5480	- 43.96%
2014	9779	- 31.97%
2013	14374	----

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Table 2

Question Number	Question Language
A-7	District [REGION – districts including Almaty, South, East, Center, North, West]
A-8	Town [GEO – towns including Almaty, Astana, Chymkent, Karaganda, Aktobe, Taraz]
A-9	Urban or Rural [RURAL]
22.	Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country today? [SATISFACTION]
23.	Would you describe the current economic situation in our country as very good, good, so-so, bad, or very bad? [ECONOMY]
33.	Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they get a chance, or would they be fair? [SOCIAL TRUST]
69.	What year were you born? [AGE]
70.	What nationality do you consider yourself? I do not necessarily mean the nationality that is recorded officially in your passport or otherwise. I am interested in what you consider to be your nationality. (Accept as answer “HALF-KAZAKH, HALF-RUSSIAN” or other dual nationalities) [ETHNICITY]
74.	What is your highest education level? [EDUCATION]
75.	Are you currently employed? [EMPLOYMENT]

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