

## CHINA AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATIONS: COOPERATION VS COMPETITION

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**Abstract.** For Kazakhstan, the Chinese experience of successfully integrating into the world economic space and building a competitive economy, assessing the role of foreign TNCs in improving the strategy for modernizing the domestic economy in order to find answers to the challenges of globalization is of great importance. The authors state in the interests of the structural reconstruction of the PRC economy, the Chinese state encourages the activities of foreign TNCs, while at the same time conducting a controlled transnationalization of the national business. The issues of the entry of the national economy into the global economy, the features of the international division of labor, the role of TNCs, the development of global value chains are considered in the works of I. Wallerstein, T. Ozawa, S. Amin, J. Schumpeter, W. Rostow and other authors. The authors rely on methods offered by a number of sciences. Competitiveness, achieved through the cooperation of the PRC with foreign TNCs and the practice of protectionism of the Chinese state for national TNCs, enables the country to take key positions in the global economy.

**Keywords:** People's Republic of China, transnational corporations, global economy, globalization, modernization, state, protectionism.

**JEL code:** F68.

**Аңдатпа.** Қазақстан үшін әлемдік экономикалық кеңістікке табысты интеграциялану және бәсекеге қабілетті экономика құру, жаһандану сын-қатерлеріне жауап іздеу мақсатында отандық экономиканы жаңғырту стратегиясын жетілдірудегі шетелдік ТҰК рөлін бағалаудың Қытай тәжірибесінің маңызы зор. Мақала авторлары ҚХР экономикасын құрылымдық қайта құру мүддесінде Қытай мемлекеті шетелдік ТҰК қызметін ынталандырып, сонымен бірге ұлттық бизнесті бақыланатын трансұлттықтандыруды жүргізіп жатқанын айқындайды. Ұлттық экономиканың жаһандық экономикаға ену мәселелері, халықаралық еңбек бөлінісінің ерекшеліктері, ТҰК рөлі, әлемдік құн тізбегінің дамуы И.Валлерстайн, Т.Озава, С. Амин, Й.Шумпетер, У.Ростоу және басқа авторлар еңбектерінде қарастырылған. Авторлар пәнаралық тәсілді қолдана отырып, бірқатар ғылымдар ұсынған әдістерге сүйенеді. ҚХР-ның шетелдік ТҰК-мен ынтымақтастығы және Қытай мемлекетінің ұлттық ТҰК үшін протекционизм тәжірибесі арқылы қол жеткізілген бәсекеге қабілеттілік елге әлемдік экономикада негізгі орындарды алуға мүмкіндік береді.

**Түйін сөздер:** Қытай Халық Республикасы, трансұлттық корпорациялар, жаһандық экономика, жаһандану, модернизация, мемлекет, протекционизм.

**JEL код:** F68.

**Аннотация.** Для Казахстана имеет важное значение китайский опыт успешного встраивания в мировое экономическое пространство и строительства конкурентоспособной экономики, оценка роли зарубежных ТНК в совершенствовании стратегии модернизации отечественной экономики. Авторы статьи констатируют, что китайское государство в интересах структурной перестройки экономики поощряет деятельность зарубежных ТНК, одновременно проводя управляемую транснационализацию отечественного бизнеса. Вопросы вхождения национальной экономики в международные экономические связи, особенности международного разделения труда, роли ТНК, развития глобальных цепочек стоимости рассмотрены в трудах И. Валлерстайна, Т. Озавы,

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С. Амина, Й. Шумпетера, У. Ростоу и других авторов. Авторы, используя междисциплинарный подход, опираются на методы, предлагаемые рядом наук. Конкурентоспособность, достигаемая благодаря сотрудничеству КНР с зарубежными ТНК и практике протекционизма китайского государства в отношении национальных ТНК, дает возможность стране занять ключевые позиции в глобальной экономике.

**Ключевые слова:** Китайская Народная Республика, транснациональные корпорации (ТНК), глобальная экономика, глобализация, модернизация, государство, протекционизм.

**JEL код:** F68.

## Introduction

In a globalized world, the experience of countries that effectively use the benefits of globalization is of particular interest. China, over the past forty years, has successfully joined the global value-added chains, has become an economic giant, one of the superpowers. In this regard, the Chinese experience of modernization, building a competitive economy, successful integration into the global economic space, is of particular interest to Kazakhstan. Moreover, Kazakhstan is one of the active participants in China's mega-project "One Belt and One Road", the purpose of which is to create external support for the modernization of the Chinese economy.

At the turn of the millennium, the key issue in achieving the goals of modernizing the Chinese economy was the problem of China's interaction with the world economy. Considering that the process of globalization cannot be stopped, but it can be directed to the benefit of the Chinese economy, the Chinese authorities decided to adapt to the conditions of the global economy. This adaptation was made possible by cooperation with TNCs.

It can be stated that in the interests of the restructuring of the PRC economy, the Chinese government encourages the activities of foreign TNCs, while at the same time conducting a controlled transnationalization of the national business. Thus, the Chinese authorities are trying not only to be actively involved in world economic relations, but since the interdependence of countries is growing, they are tasked with influencing the rules of the game, influencing the rest of the participants in global economic relations.

At present, China is increasingly using economic pressure to achieve its strategic goals, for example, resorting to mass boycott or administrative discrimination against foreign companies, restricting the movement of goods and people.

We believe that the activities of

Chinese TNCs in China in order to modernize the Chinese economy has a significant impact on the transformation of the world economy. It should be noted that the activity of Chinese TNCs falls on the domestic market. However, the national market, which is part of the global market, is becoming a space for competition between Chinese TNCs and foreign corporations.

Undoubtedly, the growth of Chinese transnational corporations and the increased role of China in the world economy is causing concern on the part of the leading countries of the world. Of course, it is also important for Kazakhstan to see the methods of work of Chinese TNCs, in general, the role of foreign TNCs in improving the strategy for modernizing the domestic economy to develop countermeasures of foreign economic policy to the challenges of globalization.

Based on the foregoing, this article aims to reveal the role of foreign and Chinese TNCs in the modernization of the Chinese economy, to analyze the conditions and methods of activity of multinational companies. The authors try to answer a number of questions. Could China have become a leading industrial and commercial world power without the support of foreign TNCs? What is the connection between the processes of economic modernization and the transnationalization of Chinese companies?

The issues of the entry of the national economy into the global economy, the features of the international division of labor, the role of TNCs and the development of global value chains are considered in the works of I. Wallerstein, T. Ozawa and other authors. Thus, relying on the world-system analysis, I. Wallerstein points out that the development of the world economy is based on the evolution of not only new ways of capital accumulation, but also new, more efficient technologies and methods of expanded reproduction (Wallerstein I., 1989).

In the context of the systemic approach

proposed by I. Wallerstein, S. Amin deduces his own version of the modernization of the economy of a developing country as the creation of "capitalism without capitalists", which practically coincides with the Chinese version of reforms (Amin S., 1976).

According to T. Ozawa, in the process of modernization, national economies with participation in the international division of labor should transform national companies into TNCs in order to benefit from globalization (Ozawa T., 2014)

The idea of innovation being a key stimulus for economic development, the demand for which is growing thanks to entrepreneurship, formed the basis of the theories of J. Schumpeter, W. Rostow, M. Porter, K. Akamatsu and others, which indicate that in the interests of modernization, countries should consistently go through certain stages of growth and levels of participation in the international division of labor.

Thus, in the work of M. Porter it is stated that multinational companies increase the competitiveness of the national economy (Porter M., 1993).

In general, it seems important to identify the links between the processes of modernization and transnationalization of the Chinese economy, to analyze the essence of the relationship between both foreign and national TNCs with the state. This task remains relevant in modern science.

### Materials and methods

The authors of the article, using an interdisciplinary approach, rely on the methods offered by a number of sciences, including economics, political science, geography, international relations and others.

Thus, in the understanding of the authors, the primacy of geoeconomics is characteristic of the modern system of international relations. As shown in the article, this is reflected in the formation of the global geo-economic space, in the output of reproduction processes beyond national boundaries. Moreover, proving that modern international economic relations are a complex set of links between international actors, in particular, between states and TNCs, the authors of the article touch upon problems of interest to researchers in various

fields of science.

The economic approach involved a microeconomic analysis of individual transnational corporations, as well as a macroeconomic analysis of the main parameters of the national economy of the PRC. In particular, the influence of TNCs on the global and national economy is considered. The key for the authors is also a systematic method, in which the economies of countries and regions, as well as TNCs as components of their economic development, are considered either as a center or as a periphery of the world economic system.

### Results

China, the giant emerging at the end of the second millennium, now appears to the world as a combination of an economy operating on a capitalist basis and a society under the complete control of the Chinese Communist Party. Although, in our opinion, the freedom of the market in the country, economic freedom in general, is limited to this day, the subordination of public life to the state, the fragmentation of individuals within it and at the same time within the true form of capitalism that accompanies it, made it possible to turn this country into a real paradise for corporate profits (J.-P. Guichard, 2014, p. 23).

As a result, under the influence of globalization and modernization processes, China is confidently moving towards world leadership. In recent years, there has been an increase in the role of the state in economic processes. Chinese companies, backed by a strong state, are striving to become world leaders in the face of confrontation with foreign TNCs that have weakened ties with their home states.

Probably due to the fact that the home countries are not strong enough, foreign TNCs do not have such support as Chinese TNCs and are potential prey for new "champions". But it must also be pointed out that the management of multinational firms, mindful of short-term financial results consolidated on a global scale, is becoming more and more indifferent to the conditions of life of workers and to the principles of ethics, which nevertheless seemed to be firmly established in developed countries (J.-P. Guichard, 2014, p. 13).

### Discussion and conclusions

When the leadership of the People's Republic of China, led by Deng Xiaoping, turned China sharply towards capitalism, opening up the Chinese economy to the world, it allowed the country to achieve rapid growth: thanks to "joint ventures" with foreign TNCs that carry their technologies. This was largely due to "joint ventures" with foreign TNCs. So, through the creation of zones with special economic zones, i.e. free economic zones, zones of new and high technologies or the so-called zones of technical and economic development, China has acquired a positive investment image and also got the opportunity to use modern technologies and management experience of foreign companies ending up with joining the global market.

Multinational firms whose profits were limited by social norms and the functioning of democratic systems in their own countries, wanting to bypass barriers in their countries, were able to form an alliance with China: the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party offered them cheap labor, and this accelerated China's transformation into a "world factory".

At the same time, the creation of joint ventures was also due to the fact that this is practically the only real way to enter the Chinese market. TNCs are forced to choose it so as not to run the risk of nationalization or other measures to restrict their activities as a result of a change in national policy.

The "model" of Chinese growth, based on the exploitation of workers and allowed by protectionist, including monetary practices, exports is great for such firms: the lower wages, the more undervalued the yuan, the higher their profits.

That is, the lower Chinese wages, the weaker the Chinese currency, the higher the corresponding profits of these firms, which thus have no interest in investing in economies of their own countries.

Thus, the economies of developed countries are under double pressure: from Chinese imports and from the decline in investment in these countries.

In such a short time, China could not have achieved such impressive results alone. In our opinion, the PRC leadership used the contribution of multinational corporations.

The persistence of the authoritarian

regime played a role. Thanks to him, wages remained low, and workers were still deprived of social rights. Due to him, strict control over the exchange rate allowed the Chinese currency to maintain a significantly undervalued rate, which gave the country a strategic competitive advantage.

This is the secret of a strong alliance between, on the one hand, the Chinese Party-State and the owners of Chinese enterprises who are also communists, and on the other hand, the management of multinational corporations, very interested in making a profit.

In a global context, the Chinese authorities are cooperating with TNCs in order to develop the competitiveness of the Chinese economy. They believed that this alliance of the PRC with foreign TNCs, borrowing technologies from them, would mark the beginning of modernization, which happened. This alliance has allowed China to achieve a record increase in its GDP and, as a result, the growth of its domestic market. Therefore, it still matters for multinational firms. Until recently, Chinese exporting enterprises were subcontractors of multinational corporations or even more modest enterprises of developed countries, that is, they were not competitors. However, the situation is rapidly changing: Chinese giant companies have appeared in many industries, they will be more and more dangerous for enterprises in developed countries in the global competition.

In addition, the position of multinational corporations is becoming increasingly dependent on the Chinese authorities. It must be understood that the liberalization of foreign economic relations does not mean a reduction in the role of the state.

On the one hand, the TNC's advantage that gave them ownership of their technology is being eroded by the massive technology transfer that continues, allowing Chinese firms to rapidly increase their competitiveness.

On the other hand, we are still talking about a very protected Chinese market, so that these firms are obliged, in order to have a long-term presence, to comply with the increasingly broad requirements of the Chinese state.

It is worth mentioning that the procedure for creating joint ventures is quite complicated, moreover, the scope of their



activities is limited every year more and more strictly. China has many opportunities to control foreign companies. For example, there are more prohibitions on investing in certain industries. The protectionist policy pursued by Beijing at the present stage, cybersecurity rules are forcing foreign companies to leave the Chinese market.

To be sure, China's current competitiveness is the product of a combination of multinational firms' technologies on China's extremely favorable production conditions, with a pronounced comparative advantage of cheap labor, as well as protectionist policies.

Since 2010, there has been a clear trend for Chinese companies to enter the world markets. They start buying foreign companies. In every industrial sector, the Chinese state plans that Chinese giant firms, capable of dominating the world market, will absorb foreign firms. First of all, those companies that are not associated with high technologies can be hit. In general, if the interests of Chinese companies clash with the interests of foreign firms, then there is a risk for foreign companies.

It is worth mentioning that Chinese state-owned companies are showing particular interest in acquiring overseas assets in the oil and gas industry. In particular, a number of investments were made in the development of oil and gas deposits in Central Asia (Samusenko, 2011). It is also worth noting that the "Grand Alliance" of the Chinese capitalist system and multinational firms is not only an alliance between them and the Chinese firms they deal with; in this marriage there is someone else: the Chinese state and the CCP, the Party-state. Chinese firms, even those that are similar in size and global scope to multinational corporations, are still different from the latter: their leaders, being most often associated with the CCP, cannot make decisions that go against the interests of the Party-State and, therefore, directives or prohibitions that may direct them (J.-P. Guichard, 2014, p. 37).

Most of the Chinese companies are state-owned, and CEOs are different from ordinary corporations. The Chinese Communist Party usually appoints top leaders. CEOs maintain close ties with senior government officials.

In its mercantilist strategy that it uses,

the CCP has not forgotten the key element of the effectiveness of the mercantilist project of world conquest - as stated in W. Petty's work "Political Arithmetic" - which is close solidarity and complementarity between enterprises and the state; however, this solidarity, in the case of China, is especially successful due to the political regime (J.-P. Guichard, 2014, p.p.37-38).

We emphasize that the Chinese authorities provide national TNCs with extensive information and consulting, tax, credit, and, above all, political support, especially abroad. Chinese companies are now leading in a number of sectors of the global economy, including telecommunications, rail transportation, and so on. The support of the state is a decisive factor for the "Chinese champions" in their conquest of world markets. With the support of an incomparably powerful state at their disposal, these "champions" have the opportunity to eliminate or take control of competing firms, which for the most part have lost the threads that bind them to their country and state.

In our opinion, the alliance of global TNCs and Chinese capitalism is a temporary phenomenon. The dynamics of the negative impact of this alliance is in full swing, it has begun to have its devastating effect on small and medium-sized enterprises in the industrial sector of developed countries; their deindustrialization is not only the business of large firms that delocalize their production: it is also the result of the blocking of development suffered by small and medium-sized businesses, doomed to stagnation.

Since the early 1990s, and especially since 2001, when China joined the WTO, this trend has been gaining momentum; entire industries of developed countries cease to exist. Many of the developed countries, countries with weak economies, risk becoming, one way or another, dependent on China, which will inevitably have a profound impact on the social balance of these countries (Cardena J.P., Araújo H., 2013).

In this regard, there are fears of business representatives of the European Union countries about the consequences of the penetration of Chinese capital into the national economy, with the exception of the business and political elite of Eastern Europe, which associates the improvement

of employment with Chinese investments (Szunomar A., 2018).

China's new national security paradigm to strengthen securitization has brought new challenges for governments, businesses and non-state actors interacting with China. Any problems, including economic ones, are considered through the prism of national security. Therefore, foreign governments and businesses are facing a China that is more willing to accept economic costs to protect its stability and broad understanding of national security, including through economic coercion. Efforts to reduce dependence on the West and competition in the technology sector will intensify. Foreign companies are subject to new legislation and political pressure (Drinhausen K, Legarda H, 2022, p.4).

Companies may face national security investigations, market restrictions, consumer boycotts, and fallout from broader economic coercion measures, even when they have been legally compliant in China (Drinhausen K, Legarda H, 2022, p.19).

The developed countries of Europe will need to confront threats to national security, they will need their own process of diversification of national economies, key sectors of which have now become dependent on China.

Today, if we do not consider large firms, but the population of developed countries, then it should be noted that they have lost a lot in the big trade game with China. As their countries deindustrialize, this population suffers from the unemployment resulting from deindustrialization and the resulting fiscal austerity.

China is developing, supporting such hegemonic ambitions, a very coherent global strategy, the most important structuring element of which is today's trade war with all developed countries.

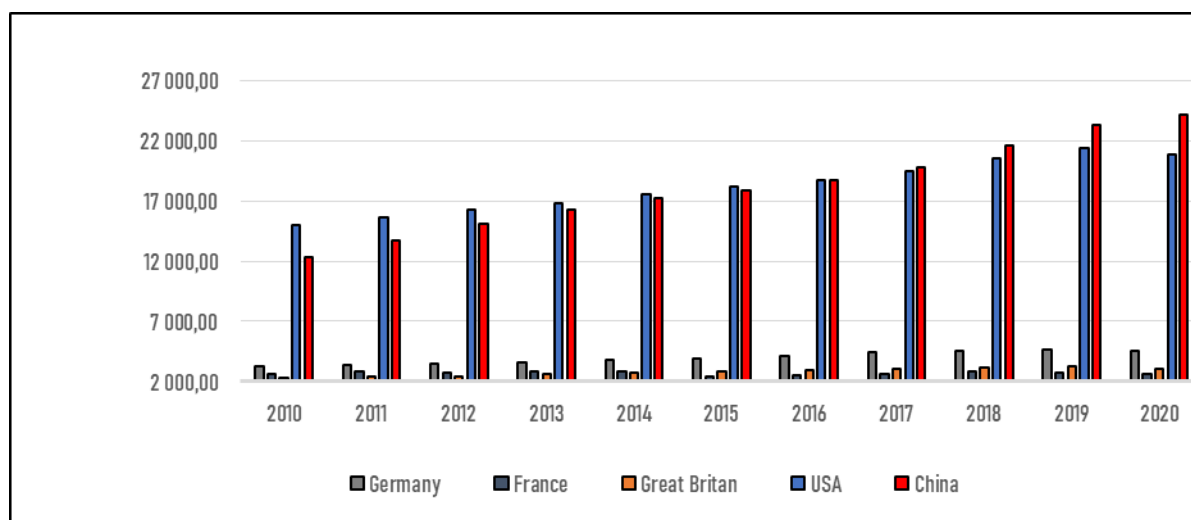
This is a war, the main weapon of which is the means to help endow Chinese

industrial producers with unprecedented competitiveness in the world. The Chinese government has shown its ability to use the means of very aggressive protectionism, mainly currency manipulation tools, by making the yuan extremely undervalued and also this is new by artificially creating demand and subsidizing Chinese exports through taxation to rapidly develop and stimulate new industries.

Chinese authorities protect their market share where Chinese companies are competitive. For example, in telecommunications and IT, where network equipment suppliers Huawei and ZTE have become leaders in the global information and telecommunications technology market, world-class competitors. China is pursuing a policy of protectionism for its "champions" and is seeking to squeeze out the foreign network equipment manufacturers it once relied on, especially as China's leaders face restrictions from the US, Europe and Japan. Chinese Internet giants Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent are expanding their expansion in the field of mobile communications, gaming applications and e-commerce (Luchko M., 2017, p.51).

In turn, Chinese TNCs circumvent the WTO ban on budget subsidies through offshore operations and the creation of diversified holdings, thus strengthen their positions, on the one hand, and protect the domestic market of China, as well as high-tech industries, on the other hand. China aims to reduce its dependence on the US financial system.

Due to its competitiveness due to the conditions of labor exploitation and the exchange rate of its currency, the growth rate of China's economy is relatively high. It can be noted, observing the ratio between China's GDP and the GDP of developed countries, that China's economic power is growing at a high pace.



source: IMF. Gross Domestic Product // <https://www.imf.org>

**Diagram 1 - Nominal GDP (PPP, in billion \$)**

A fact of great importance should be emphasized here: the similar growth rates of China and the developed countries are interdependent: the slow growth of the developed countries is directly due to their external deficit, which is itself connected, to a large extent, with China's "super-competitiveness" based on numerous forms of protectionism, including currency.

By comparison, the British Empire began to decline from 1870, starting a game of free trade with two countries that were very protectionist at the time, the US and Germany. They gradually cut its share of the world market: the power of the Empire was weakened on the eve of the First World War.

The ruling elite of the CCP has no interest in going against such a dynamic, the continuation of which could lead to Chinese hegemony in the world (J.-P. Guichard, 2014, p. 39.).

As for developing countries, one can point to the consolidation of their dependence on the PRC economy through national standards, technologies, equipment and personnel, which are actively supplied to these countries. In general, Chinese TNCs are interested in cheap resources of developing countries.

The integration of the national economy into the world economic space, its inclusion in global value chains is a key factor in increasing its competitiveness. Thus, China is far from being an autarky, but is striving to implement its economic strategy of managed integration.

It should be noted that at the current stage of modernization, the PRC is entering into fierce competition with developed countries in their monopoly markets for high-tech products, which can push the country away from economic competition to political opposition. The situation with the Korean TNC LG Energy Solution, the largest battery company in the world, can be cited as an example. LG Energy Solutions fell victim to Chinese pressure on the South Korean government, when in response to the deployment of the US terminal high-altitude area defense system (THAAD) in 2017, Beijing banned the use of Korean batteries in electric vehicles. This made it possible for the Chinese CATL, a competitor of LG Energy Solution, to occupy this niche. The Chinese government can be said to have achieved a double goal: supporting the national TNC on the one hand and exerting economic pressure on the neighboring country in political interests.

Nevertheless, it is important for the PRC to participate in global economic integration in order to modernize its economy. In recent years, national security has become a key paradigm that also influences China's economic strategy. The turn towards securitization has added new challenges for TNCs dealing with China.

So, the high competitiveness achieved through cooperation with foreign TNCs and the practice of protectionism of the Chinese state for national TNCs that it controls in one form or another, regardless of whether these firms are state-owned or private, ultimately

led the PRC to the opportunity to control the global economy, forming the economic and

financial basis for eventual political hegemony.

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## ҚЫТАЙ ЖӘНЕ ТРАНСҰЛТТЫҚ КОРПОРАЦИЯЛАР: ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚ VS БӘСЕКЕЛЕСТІК

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## КИТАЙ И ТРАНСНАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ КОРПОРАЦИИ: СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО VS КОНКУРЕНЦИЯ

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