

UDC 327

SOFT POWER OF CHINA IN CENTRAL ASIA

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China's soft power, the power of attraction, is as often debated as it is misunderstood. The US boasts Hollywood, globally-recognized brands and companies, and its quest for democratic 'evangelization'; the European Union has a romantic and touristic appeal, a (struggling) sense of supranational unity, and its far-reaching foreign policy of assistance; Japan and South Korea are both formidable pop-culture exporters. But what about China's soft power resources and strategies? When read through Joseph Nye's triad – culture, values, and policies – it may be hard to identify the sources of attraction. China's culture still has limited appeal, its values mostly fail to reflect the country's image and reputation abroad, and its foreign policy is seen with skepticism at best – and as hegemonic at worst. Thus, it is legitimate to ask whether China's 'charm offensive' is losing momentum.

Following its phenomenal economic growth over the past few decades, most of China's appeal resides in this successful story, especially in the eyes of developing countries. However, the process is still in the making. Although tens of millions of citizens have been lifted from poverty, fears of falling into the middle-income trap are present, along with domestic problems such as an aging population and concerns about a sustainable innovation pace. More broadly, it is fair to say that China's soft power heavily relies on its economic clout.

The term "soft power" was introduced into scientific circulation by Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, professor at Harvard University, who held a position in the 90s of the XX century. high government posts. The specification of the concept of "soft power" is most vividly represented by the experience of China. Thus, the first Chinese article on "soft power" was

written by Wang Huning, chairman of the Department of International Politics at Fudan University and adviser to President Jiang Zemin in 1993 – “Culture as a National Force: Soft Power”. In this article, Wang Huning argues that culture is the main source of the “soft power” of the state. Chinese analysts still follow this thesis: the so-called “cultural school” has been formed, whose representatives consider culture to be the core of the “soft power” of the state. In contrast to this trend, there is an opposite view of representatives of the “political school”, who say (for example, Yan Xuetong) that building up cultural power does not mean strengthening the “soft power” of the state.[1]

China could generate more soft power if it loosened tight party control over civil society. Manipulation of the media and reliance on shadow communication channels also often leads to a weakening of soft power. Democratic countries should not be tempted to copy such authoritarian instruments of sharp force. China's economic successes have helped it create both hard and soft power, but with limitations. The Chinese economic aid package under the Belt and Road Initiative may look positive and attractive, but only if the conditions of this assistance do not become as unpleasant as they turned out to be in the recent case of the port project in Sri Lanka.[2]

Central Asia is one of the regions with which China has traditionally and for a long period of time had close ties. One aspect of China’s ties and relations with Central Asian countries which has taken into consideration through the last decade is cultural relations and in particular, China’s attempts to develop its soft power instruments in the region; a trend which has reflected in various issues. For many years during the Soviet period, China was able to establish strong relations with the region, but the collapse of the Soviet Union forced China to pursue a policy towards this region. Indeed, China's first policy in this region was negotiations on the demarcation of the border with Russia. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan through bilateral and multilateral discussions. The next policy was related to security due to the critical situation that exploded in Afghanistan and the growing instability in the western Chinese region of Xinjiang, densely populated by Muslims. In those years. China, together with Russia and the countries of the region, created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which was to play an important role in strengthening the Chinese presence and security interests in the region. Especially since 2013, China has made great efforts to establish positive relations with the newly independent republics. In order to create positive relations with this area, China has given priority to economic relations, promising reliable and significant credit opportunities for the economic and social development of the countries of the region. At the same time, China has ousted Russia from the post of the main trading partner of the region in less than ten years. Central Asia has acquired an important strategic importance and importance for Chinese ambitions, given the geographical location between the supplier and the end markets. This condition allowed China and its leadership to implement their "going outside" strategy in various areas. For several decades, China has been able to overtake Russia as the main trading partner of the Central Asian countries.[3]

Thus, in contrast to the weighted ones, the neighboring states of Central Asia and Russia are not only a profitable source of natural resources and a market for finished goods for China, but also a profitable transit corridor with access to Europe. China's soft power policies were particularly prominent during the reign of Hu Jintao, and now Xi Jinping seems to deny most of them. It was not without the fact that the Chinese authorities began to promote their culture. One of the branches of the "soft power" policy was also based on raising this culture. Because in order to introduce indigenous peoples to their culture, to make sure that it is a civilized culture, in order The Chinese authorities pay great attention to Kazakhstan. After all, it is Kazakhstan that connects them with Western Europe across the continent. The strengthening of corruption in Kazakhstan is also optimal for this position. Now they have already got used to how to work with us. Corruption benefits China. For Asians to be assimilated, we paid attention to this issue.[4]

Another direction was cultural and humanitarian cooperation, which implies the promotion of the image of China as an ally seeking cooperation and mutual assistance. Under this idea, Confucius institutes operating under state universities were opened in Central Asian countries. To date, there are five Confucius Institutes in Kazakhstan, four in Kyrgyzstan, and two in Uzbekistan, as well as in Tajikistan.

In these institutes, students are taught Chinese language, culture, and history. Successful graduates get the opportunity to continue their education in China itself. Students in the process of learning through knowledge become more loyal to China, and the part that had the opportunity to visit China, begin to feel sympathy for the state. According to the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China for 2017, the number of Kazakhstani students in China has reached 13.2 thousand; Uzbek students about 5 thousand; about 11 thousand people from Kyrgyzstan; Tajik students in China is still several hundred people.[5]

Similarly, Central Asian countries face the challenge of building an image in China because they rely on China for effective promotion and mutually beneficial cooperation. These problems and difficulties are future problems.

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