

Educational and Cultural Links of Central Asian Countries: Common and Special Considerations

Ainur Nogayeva*

1. Introduction

The ways states affect international processes and other countries are expanding in the 21st century. Today, the ideological and cultural attractiveness of a country, together with its economic success, is almost a more important factor of influence than the possession of military power and nuclear weapons. The American political scientist who pondered on this attraction was Joseph Nye, professor at Harvard University Kennedy School of Public Administration. Nye invented and popularized the concept of “soft power” which entered the international relations literature in 1990 with Nye’s *Bound to Lead - The Changing Nature of American Power*.¹ Nye divided foreign policy instruments into two as “hard” and “soft” power. The first group includes methods applied by the country’s military and economic forces (intimidation with military force, economic sanctions or threat to use barriers). “Soft” power is the ability to attract through one’s own culture, political ideals and programs. In a world where states are trying to protect their independence, “hard” power has not yet lost its key value. But “soft power” is gradually gaining in importance and is becoming a serious alternative to “hard power”, creating opportunities for new alliances based not only on political and economic interests, but also on the basis of shared moral and intellectual values.²

* Erzincan Binali Yıldırım University, Turkey; L.N. Gumilev Euroasia National University, Kazakhstan.

1 Joseph Nye, *Bound To Lead: The Changing Nature Of American Power* (Basic Books, 1990).

2 Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

As Nye, who introduced the concept, stated, the concept of “soft power”, which attracted more attention than he expected, became so widespread and discussed that Nye wrote various articles on it - apart from his books - and set out to reinforce / strengthen the concept. In addition to the USA, which is the homeland of the International Relations discipline, the concept has drawn the attention of Russian researchers (even institutions-centres and universities), and it has been researched and discussed in the academic environment with all its aspects and details.

Chinese researchers are also among those who show great interest in this popular topic. The interest in the subject goes parallel with the attempt to determine China’s role and place in the world - within the framework of the “Second Big” approach. To demonstrate the general interest in and popularity of the concept, the phrase “China soft power” or “Chinese soft power” in the search engine gives 352 million results in 0.58 seconds, of which the number of academic articles/research is around 1.8 million.³

The “soft power” concept, discussed in the academic environment, has been widely applied by many countries. For this, various tools such as NGOs and volunteers as well as state institutions are involved. The areas that show the soft power of countries the most are culture and education. Undoubtedly today, it is very important to attract the attention of foreign students besides the investors. Because the future elites/intellectuals of various states of the world will be raised within the walls of the best universities in the world. In this context, education as a “soft power” tool is considered much more effective than military or other means in influencing the external environment.⁴ The Central Asian region is no exception in this regard.

After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the Central Asian region has become an arena of competition among major players. This competition was not limited to the fields of security and energy. Besides the West (the USA and the EU), the

³ Search results as of 1.10.2019.

⁴ Anatolij Torkunov, “Obrazovanie Kak Instrument ‘Mjagkoj Sily’ Vo Vneshnej Politike Rossii” [“Education as a Means of Soft Power in Russian Foreign Policy”], *Rossijskij Sovet Po Mezhdunarodnym Delam: Vneshnjaja Politika*, 27 February 2013, Access Date: May 10, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/obrazovanie-kak-instrument-myagkoy-sily-vo-vneshney-politike/>.

activities of Russia and China in the region are also influential in the fields of education and culture. While the USA and the EU are operating actively in the region within the framework of various educational and cultural programs (such as American Corners or educational scholarships), Russia is the leading country attracting Central Asian students. On the other hand, China, the third in the world in the number of foreign students, actively uses the Confucius Institute network in the region. The influence of these countries in the field of education and culture is gradually increasing in the region.

Emphasizing that the activities of the regional and non-regional forces in the region are effective not only in the areas of security and energy but in the fields of education and culture, this study aims to determine the level of the referred efficiency of especially the USA, Russia and China in the region and the general and specific aspects of their connections in the region. Based on statistical data and previous research on the region, this study discusses the common and special issues of Western countries (the USA and Europe), Russia and China in educational and cultural connections in the region and assesses their mutual relations with Central Asian countries. The following section includes soft power measurements developed by various individuals and organizations in order to reveal which countries have more “soft power” in the Central Asian region. The third part discusses the educational and cultural activities of these four international powers in the region. The study concludes with a summary of the findings.

2. Soft Power Ratings

Experts trying to measure the soft power of countries have developed various indices using different quantitative and qualitative methods and constructed indices to rate them. Countries that have a certain popularity and attractiveness use these attributes to contribute to their influence in other (military, diplomatic, economic) fields. These ratings are important tools which allow us to determine which countries are at the top.

“Soft Power 30” is the most comprehensive soft power index prepared by the Portland organization -in cooperation with Facebook and ComRes- each year to calculate the global influence of countries. Annual reports are prepared according to this index. The soft powers of the countries are evaluated according to the criteria

gathered under six main headings. These headings are: Digital, Enterprise, Engagement, Government, Culture and Education. Under “Culture” sub-title, the opportunities of the country’s cultural products to reach the world are evaluated, while the level of human capital, the support offered to scientists and the attraction of the country for foreign students are discussed under “Education” sub-title. As can be seen in Table 19.1, while the USA ranks first in cultural evaluation, it is followed by the European countries including the United Kingdom, France and Germany in same order. China is in the 9th place, while South Korea occupies the 11th place.

Table 19.1. Culture Ranking of Soft Power, 2018⁵

Rank	Country	Score
01	United States	77.11
02	United Kingdom	77.07
03	France	70.88
04	Germany	69.32
05	Spain	55.94
06	Netherlands	54.29
07	Australia	53.11
08	Belgium	51.66
09	China	50.73
10	Italy	50.72
11	South Korea	50.38
12	Canada	50.03
13	Sweden	49.84
14	Japan	47.72
15	Switzerland	46.27
16	Norway	45.39
17	Austria	41.93
18	Ireland	41.91
19	Brazil	41.49
20	Denmark	40.03
21	Russian Federation	37.48
22	Poland	36.49
23	Finland	34.76

⁵ “A Global Ranking of Soft Power”, Soft Power 30, Portland 2018, Access Date: August 12, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://softpower30.com/>.

24	Greece	33.70
25	Portugal	31.72
26	Argentina	31.33
27	Czech Republic	31.03
28	Singapore	30.90
29	New Zealand	30.44
30	Hungary	26.22

Source: Soft Power 30, 2018

The USA and the European countries are at the top in the evaluation of the educational impact of thirty countries in the “Soft Power 30” ranking (Table 19.2). Among the Eastern countries, Japan ranked 10th, China 13th, and South Korea 15th. Russia, included in the index in 2017, ranked 15th in 2017, 18th in 2018 in the field of education, and 12th and 21st in the cultural ranking, respectively.

Table 19.2. Education Ranking of Soft Power, 2018⁶

Rank	Country	Score
01	United States	87.81
02	Germany	87.08
03	United Kingdom	86.40
04	Netherlands	84.36
05	France	83.13
06	Australia	82.85
07	Canada	81.85
08	Belgium	81.33
09	Italy	80.86
10	Japan	80.52
11	Sweden	79.73
12	Denmark	79.04
13	China	78.01
14	Switzerland	77.90
15	South Korea	77.76
16	Spain	75.67
17	Austria	74.44
18	Russian Federation	73.47

⁶ “A Global Ranking of Soft Power”, Soft Power 30.

19	Finland	72.12
20	New Zealand	69.37
21	Norway	67.95
22	Poland	67.58
23	Singapore	65.43
24	Ireland	59.49
25	Greece	56.64
26	Portugal	55.99
27	Brazil	55.64
28	Czech Republic	54.55
29	Hungary	52.96
30	Argentina	46.32

Source: Soft Power 30, 2018

In studies examining “soft power” indices and ratings, data from some public opinion surveys other than “Soft Power 30” are also important. “The New Persuaders: An International Ranking of Soft Power” and “Soft Power Survey 2013” by the Institute for Government, an independent organization in England, and Monocle magazine in 2010, 2011 and 2012, as well as “Rapid-Growth Markets Soft Power Index” developed by the Moscow School of Management Skolkovo are among these indices. In addition to these indices, Table 19.3 shows the positions of countries according to other different indices.

Table 19.3. Image and Soft Power Rankings⁷

Rankings	The New Persuaders III. 2012 Global Ranking of Soft Power/Soft Power 30 (2017)		Rapid-growth Markets Soft Power Index (2012 and 2017)		Country Brand Index (2012-2013 and 2014-2015)	
	Number of Countries	40	30	20	113	118
Top Countries	UK USA Germany	France UK USA	China India Russia	China Russia Poland	Switzerland Canada Japan	Japan Switzerland Germany

⁷ Source for 2012 data: M. V. Larionova, *Myagkaja Sila– Resurs Vneshnei Politiki* [Soft Power as a Source of Foreign Policy]. Access Date: February 13, 2016. Retrieved from: <http://goo.gl/wfuDx4>.

In the aforementioned *The New Persuaders Soft Power Ranking*, a total of 50 indicators are assessed. The index contains indicators from statistical sources and expert evaluations in five areas determined as diplomacy, public administration, business and innovation, as well as culture (annual number of tourists, global distribution of the music industry, achievements in sports) and education (ability to attract foreign students, educational exchanges, university competitiveness). In addition to these, criteria such as brands, national airlines/major airports, cuisine, “soft power” symbols, global leadership, achievements, design/architecture are also discussed in this index.

The most comprehensive example of experiments based solely on quantitative data is the *Rapid Growing Markets Soft Power Index*.⁸ The initiative in question is an indexing study that has been repeated periodically since 2005 by Ernest&Young’s Emerging Markets Center. The most important distinguishing feature of the index is its claim to be based on objective quantitative data, not on public opinion surveys. In this context, 13 soft power indicators, which are assumed to be measurable through available quantitative data, were determined, and soft power of states were aimed to be analyzed comparatively by using these indicators. These 13 variables were included in three main sub-indices: global virtue, global cohesion and global image. Within the global virtue sub-index, it is aimed to measure the country’s adherence to ethical and moral principles. The rule of law, freedom, voter turnout and carbon dioxide emissions are the titles of the data sets in this context. Within the global cohesion sub-index, the form and size of the country’s relationship with the rest of the world is aimed to be determined. Data such as the number of immigrants living in the country, the number of tourists coming to the country, the place of the country’s universities in the ranking of the world’s best universities, and the level of English proficiency in the country are presented as other criteria of soft power. In the global image sub-index, data sets are created that try to determine the global popularity of the country and the level of admiration it has. In this context, factors such as the export figures of media products originating from the country, the popularity of the country’s language, the Olympic medals won,

⁸ Utku Yapıcı, “Yumuşak Güç Ölçülebilir mi?” [“Can Soft Power Be Measured?”], *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 12, no. 47 (2015): 5-25.

the number of citizens who are global icons, and the number of companies originating from the country are assessed.⁹ According to the 2017 index evaluating 113 countries, while China maintained its leadership, Russia rose from third to second place.¹⁰

Country Brand Index, on the other hand, is the evaluation of the basic elements of a country brand using survey methods. In the index made in 2012-2013, 3600 participants from 18 countries took part and interviews and focus group studies were carried out with experts in different fields. As a result, the evaluations were assessed within the framework of the following basic indicators: value system (political freedoms, environmental protection, stable legal environment, tolerance, freedom of speech), quality of life (education system, health system, housing and social services standards, security, employment opportunities, preference of place of residence), favorable business environment (investment environment, technological development, legal regulation, availability of qualified personnel), heritage and culture (history, art and culture, preservation of traditions, nature), tourism (quality products at affordable prices, travel, accommodation and rest opportunities, food/nutrients). In the most recent 2014-2015 ranking, in addition to the three countries listed in Table 19.3, the European countries and the USA were among the top ten countries.

Russian experts also researched which country has more “soft power” in the Central Asian region (other than Russia), and their findings are presented in the table below.

Table 19.4. Soft Power impact assessment in 10 countries, including Central Asia and Caucasus countries, except Russia, 2014

Ranking	Country	Score
1	United Kingdom	46,54
2	EU	46,00
3	Germany	37,46

⁹ “Rapid Growing Markets Soft Power Index”, E&Y, 2012, Access Date: September 12, 2019. Retrieved from: [https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Rapid-growth_markets:_Soft_power_index/\\$FILE/Rapid-growth_markets-Soft_Power_Index-Spring_2012.pdf](https://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Rapid-growth_markets:_Soft_power_index/$FILE/Rapid-growth_markets-Soft_Power_Index-Spring_2012.pdf).

¹⁰ “China & Russia Lead 2017 Emerging Market Soft Power Index”, CEIBS, November 30, 2017. Access Date: October 10, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.ceibs.edu/new-papers-columns/china-russia-lead-2017-emerging-market-soft-power-index>

4	USA	35,15
5	France	34,00
6	China	33,85
7	Turkey	32,38
8	Italy	31,77
9	Japan	30,85
10	Canada	21,31

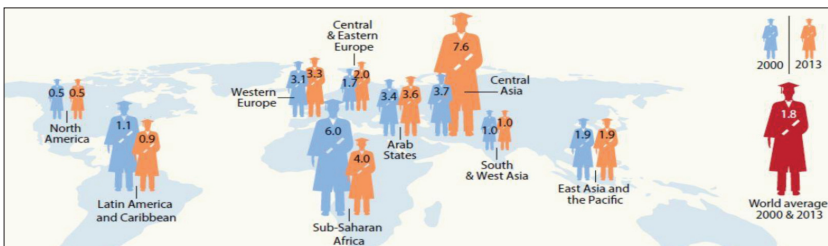
Source: M.V. Larionova, Myagkaja Sila– Resurs Vneshnei Politiki [Soft Power as a Source of Foreign Policy].

3. Educational and Cultural Links of Central Asian Countries

The top countries in global soft power ratings are also those which have considerable influence in the Central Asian region with respect to the links of the countries of the region in the field of education and culture. In line with the stated purpose, this study only focuses on the effect of the USA, Europe, Russia and China in the region. The crucial point to be made here is that the countries of the region attach special importance to the educational and cultural links in their relations with these top countries and they usually support their activities on their territories in order to adapt to global trends such as internationalization.

The increase in the rate of academic mobility of the youth of the region compared to other regions (Figure 19.1) also reflects the level of links in the field of education in the region.

Figure 19.1. Proportion of students going abroad by region, 2000 and 2013¹¹



Source: Introduction for UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2016

¹¹ Chiao-Ling Chien, "ISCED for Comparing Education Systems across Countries", *Introduction for UNESCO Institute for Statistics*, Tokyo, 29 January 2016. Access Date: January 12, 2019, Retrieved from: <https://www.abk.or.jp/doc/seminar1601E.PDF>

In this figure, illustrating the mobility rate of outgoing students by region, the said rate is expressed as the percentage of the total number of university students studying abroad in a country and the total university student rate in that country. In other words, as of 2013, 7.6 of 100 university students in Central Asia went abroad for education.¹² Here, the Central Asian region is among the regions with the highest amount of mobility.

3.1. The Position of the USA in the Region as the Leader of the “Soft Power”

The USA, where the concept was introduced, has been the undisputed leader in the use of “soft power” for years. “Soft power” was one of the key factors for the US victory in the Cold War. Today, “soft power” contributes to the spread of the influence of the country, whose culture has a certain popularity and attractiveness, and the use of military, diplomatic and economic pressure methods. The USA has demonstrated its effectiveness in the region through the military bases established in the countries of the region and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program after September 11, through American enterprises operating in line with the policy of “multiple pipelines” in the energy sector, and by establishing cooperations with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and volunteers for democratization (spreading democracy), and has attempted to spread the political image of the “super power” it created in the mass consciousness. In Central Asia, as in other parts of the world, the USA concentrated on education and culture.¹³

Attractive educational opportunities and culture in the USA are widely promoted in the region by various means. Central Asian American University (Bishkek) founded in 1993 and providing education to 1200 students, and KIMEP and Kazakh-American University in Almaty are higher education institutions operating for the youth of the region. At the same time, American Corners, which serve as both cultural and educational centers in the region, are also active. These centers, which operate within the libraries of the countries they are in, carry out wide scale activities such as providing

¹² “Global’nye Potoki Studentov [“Global Flows of University Students”], Vestnik Vyshey Shkoly (High School Herald). Access Date: September 15, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://almavest.ru/en/node/1333>.

¹³ Ainur Nogayeva, *Soft Power of Big Powers in Central Asia (Instruments, Processes and Limitations)* (Ankara: Orion Publishing, 2020), 86-87.

information about education opportunities in the USA, providing resources to help learn English, strengthening communication between alumni, providing high school and university students with the opportunity to study in the “Makerspace” laboratory in the fields of science/technology, and celebrating American holidays together.¹⁴ They are in close cooperation with the regional authorities. Today, 11 American Corners operate in Kazakhstan¹⁵, 7 in Kyrgyzstan¹⁶ and 7 in Tajikistan.¹⁷ American corners in the region are also actively participating in exchange programs. All these activities are coordinated by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), USAID, the American Council on International Education (ACTR/ACCELS), the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) American Board, and the Culture Departments of US Embassy in the countries of the region.

3.2. *Activities of the European Union in the Region*

European culture is an important element of the EU’s “soft power” in the world and especially in Central Asia. Similarly, since Western education is the priority for many people in the region, it enables the countries of the region to establish close links with the European countries. Among these are training programs such as Bolashak (for Kazakhstan), and “Erasmus+”. Despite the high costs, Bolashak has provided approximately 10,000 students with the opportunity to study abroad.¹⁸

The European Union defines itself on the basis of norms and values rather than pure interests, but in Central Asia the EU often acts on the basis of a combination of European interests and values.¹⁹

¹⁴ “American Corners and Culture Centers in Kazakhstan”, Access Date: October 5, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://www.amcorners.kz>.

¹⁵ “American Corners and Culture Centers in Kazakhstan”.

¹⁶ “American Corners” The American Embassy in Kyrgyzstan, Access Date: October 5, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://kg.usembassy.gov/ru/education-culture-ru/american-corners-ru/>.

¹⁷ In addition to these 7 American Corners, the American Culture Center operates under the Tajik Pedagogical Institute in the Pencikent region. “American Corners in Tajikistan” The American Embassy in Tajikistan], Access Date: October 5, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://tj.usembassy.gov/ru/education-culture-ru/american-corner-tajikistan-ru/>.

¹⁸ “OECD Kazakhstan Report”. IAC, 2017, Access Date: June 2, 2019, p.34. Retrieved from: http://iac.kz/sites/default/files/otchet_oesr_po_rk_2017_rus_s_pravkami.pdf.

¹⁹ Burulkan Abdibaitova Pala, “Central Asian States’ Relations with the EU (1991-2020)” in *The Changing Perspectives of Central Asia in the 21st Century*, Eds. Murat Yorulmaz & Serdar Yilmaz (İstanbul, Kriter Publishing, 2020), p.260.

According to Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, the European Union places a strong emphasis on supporting education in Central Asia. However, like the Central Asian states themselves, the EU has tended to focus too much on higher education and the development of practical skills in the Central Asian workforce, at the expense of K-12 education.²⁰

In addition, the studies and activities of the European Union representations, embassies of the European countries and European cultural centers in Central Asia are more prominent compared to other countries. This contributes to the international academic mobility of Central Asian students.

3.3. Activities of the People's Republic of China in the Region

China's economic growth and development in areas such as space, sports and technology, achieved in the first quarter of the century, increased its influence in the international arena. In order to eliminate the threat perception that increased in parallel with its growth rate, China attaches great importance to soft power both at the administrative and research level, and for this purpose, it activates its activities in international politics and actively uses its foreign policy initiatives, values and culture. The Chinese government is taking steps to display a positive image to the world, especially to the neighboring countries. In parallel with its world leadership approach in the field of education, which constitutes the most important sources of "soft power", we see that China has become a center of attraction and surpassed France, which has been the top country in this field for years (Figure 19.2).

²⁰ Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, "A Steady Hand: The EU 2019 Strategy and Policy Toward Central Asia", (Washington, D.C.: Johns Hopkins University, 2019), 9. Access Date: December 12, 2020, - Retrieved from: <https://isdp.eu/content/uploads/2019/11/EU-Central-Asia-25.11.19-Print-V-wCover.pdf>

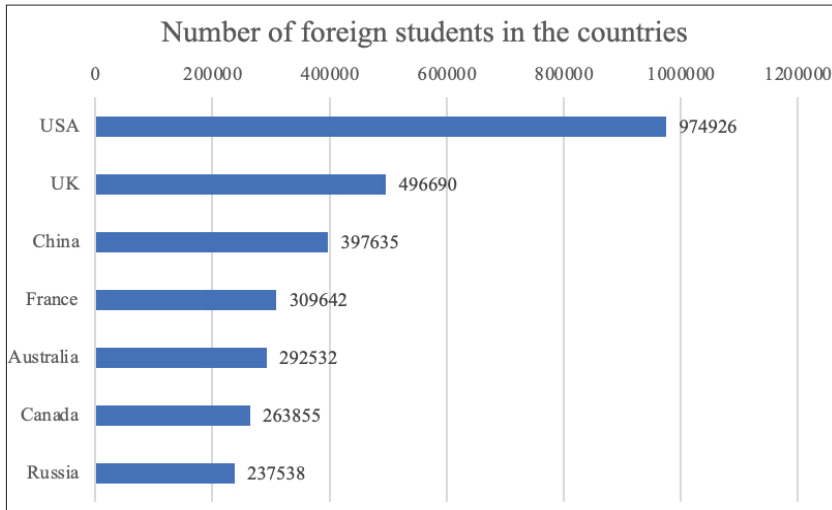


Figure 19.2. Number of foreign students in the countries, 2015²¹

Source: Marat Shibutov, “Myagkaja Sila Kitaja i Kak Ee İzmerit’ [China’s Soft Power and How It Can Be Measured.]” Access Date: September 5, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2200602.html>.

Although Russia is the first choice of students in the countries of the region for studying abroad, students, in recent years, have been benefiting from attractive education opportunities in China as well as the European countries. Researching this issue, Koshanova and Rakisheva draw attention to the following data: As of August 2014, forty five thousand Kazakh citizens received education abroad, 26,600 of them in Russia, 9,670 in China, 4,000 in the United Kingdom, approximately 1,000 in each the USA and Czech Republic, 1,500 in Malaysia, 715 in the UAE and 783 in Turkey.²²

Learning Chinese is also becoming increasingly popular, primarily for economic reasons, such as the employment of graduates by Chinese companies operating in the region. The fact that foreign students in China are from the former USSR countries -especially Russia and Kazakhstan- gives an idea about China’s connections

²¹ Marat Shibutov, “Myagkaja Sila Kitaja i Kak Ee İzmerit’ [China’s Soft Power and How Can It Be Measured.]” Access Date: September 5, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/2200602.html>.

²² Saule Koshanova and Botagoz Rakisheva, *Uchebnaja Migracija İz Respubliki Kazahstan V Kitajskuju Narodnuju Respubliku Kak Odin İz Aspektov Strategicheskogo Sotrudnichestva Mezhu Stranami*, (Almaty: Institut Obshestvennoe Mnenie, 2016) 53-54.

and future influence in the region. As in many countries and regions, the opening of 13 Confucius Institutes in the region, including 5 in Kazakhstan, 4 in Kyrgyzstan, 2 in Uzbekistan, and 2 in Tajikistan²³, is important in terms of teaching Chinese language and culture.

The first of the four important methods used by China in the use of soft power in the world and in the region is to associate its activities with the name "Confucius". Those who fear "demographic invasion" through influence and language and have a negative perception of China do not share the same negative feelings towards this great Eastern thinker. The second is to link activities with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Presence of Confucius Institute in the region or educational quotas allocated for the countries of the region, etc. are closely related to the SCO, the main instrument of China's policy towards the region. The third method is the delivery of the message "I'm back" through these institutes. The first Confucius Institute project, launched in the twenty-first century, was opened in the Republic of Korea, the fallen "last castle" which was "part of China's traditional cultural empire" in the nineteenth century. Thus, was given the message, "I am regaining my old strength". Finally, the Beijing Consensus was developed to show the country is responsible and peaceful but not aggressive power in order to prevent polarization against China's growing power. This model was realized for the implementation of the "Shanghai Spirit" presented in the countries of the region within the framework of the SCO.²⁴

3.4. *The Influence of Russia in Central Asia*

Russia, which is not included in the ranking organized by Russian researchers (Table 19.4.), is the leader in the region, and its interest and influence in the region is mainly based on the following issues: The presence of Russian citizens in the countries of the region, the Russian language influence being largely preserved in the region, and the presence of a large number of Central Asian immigrants who went to work in Russia.²⁵ In addition, Central Asian countries, which are part of the integration processes in the former Soviet

²³ See: Confucius Institutes Classroom Official Website, Access Date: October 12, 2019. Retrieved from: http://english.hanban.org/node_10971.htm

²⁴ Ainur Nogayeva, "Limitations of Chinese 'Soft Power' in Its Population and Language Policies in Central Asia", *Geopolitics* 20, No. 3, (2015): 583- 605.

²⁵ Ainur Nogayeva, "ABD, Rusya ve Çin'in Nüfuz Mücadelesinde Orta Asya: Araçlar ve Süreçler" [Central Asia in the Struggle for Influence of the USA, Russia and China: Tools and Processes], *Biliş* 62, (2012): 185.

geography, are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (KGAT) except for Turkmenistan, and the SCO, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Russia has common historical values and cultural heritage originating from the Soviet past in the countries of the region. To turn these opportunities into advantages, Russia continues to strengthen its position both in the region and in other world countries within the framework of the concept of “soft power,” included in the Russian foreign policy concept in 2013. Russian experts and officials are concerned that while the number of Russian speakers in the world was 312 million in 1990,²⁶ today this number (144 million people in 2009)²⁷ is declining. The position of the Russian language is of great importance in the relations of the countries of the region with the CIS and the EAEU as well as with the KGAT and the SCO, which Russia is also a member. The table below presents data on the Russian speaking rate of the population in the countries of the region.

Table 19.5. Russian Speaking Rate of the Population in Central Asia, million (2009-2012)²⁸

Country	Total Population	Russians	Russian Native Speakers	Russian Speakers (Actively)
Kazakhstan	16	3,79	2,5	13,5/ 11,5
Kyrgyzstan	5,55	0,38	0,4	2,7/ 2
Uzbekistan	28,6	0,7	0,9	11,8/ 4
Tajikistan	7,57	0,04	0,05	2,5/ 0,9
Turkmenistan	5,11	0,14	0,15	0,9/ 0,6

Russian universities come first among the preferences of those who have a good command of the Russian language. In the countries of the region, Russian Slavic Universities are the top higher institutions providing education within the framework of Russian education programs. In 2014 – 2015, 11303 students received education at the Russian-Kyrgyz Slavic University, 5087 students at the Russian-

²⁶ Oleg Molodov, “Russian Language as the Instrument of ‘Soft Power’ In the Countries of Central Asia”, *Nauchnyj zhurnal “Diskurs-Pi”* 11, no.2-3 (2014): 93-94.

²⁷ A.L. Aref’ev, *Sovremennoe sostoyanie i tendencii rasprostraneniya russkogo yazyka v mire*. Nauchnoe izdanie / Pod red. akademika G.V. Osipova. (Moscow: ISPI RAN, 2017), 124.

²⁸ Molodov, “Russian Language as the Instrument of ‘Soft Power’”, 95.

Tajik Slavic University, and 1230 students at the Kyrgyz-Russian Education Academy.²⁹ Majority of the foreign students studying in Russia (79.2%) are from the former USSR countries, led by the Central Asian region, primarily Kazakhstan (36%), Uzbekistan (11%) and Turkmenistan (9%).³⁰

A comprehensive study conducted in 2014-2015 by the Public Opinion Institute (Kazakhstan) on the initiative of the Ebert Fund, targeting youngsters in Central Asian countries excluding Turkmenistan, reveals the foreign policy priorities of youngsters, as well as their answers to questions in various fields. The results show the achievements (attractiveness) of the countries that are the leaders of “soft power” in Central Asia according to the above-mentioned indices, as a result of their efforts in various fields.

Table 19.6. Foreign Policy Priorities of Central Asian Youth (14-29 years): “With Which Country Should Your Country Make Efforts to Build Closer and Tight Relationships?”,

Countries	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan
Russia	72,0	87,1	70,2	89,7
USA	18,3	26,4	34,2	26,5
EU	37,6	32,6	41,0	39,9
China	30,7	35,5	46,6	58,7
South Korea	20,8	27,1	51,6	31,8
Eurasian Economic Union	48,9	50,6	41,5	57,2
Kazakhstan	-	62,1	48,0	63,2
Kyrgyzstan	35,0	-	31,0	56,1
Uzbekistan	29,8	16,6	-	42,2
Tajikistan	23,5	20,1	24,5	-

Source: Designed based on research results from the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Public Opinion Institute in 2014.³¹

²⁹ Molodov, “Russian Language as the Instrument of ‘Soft Power’”, 95-96.

³⁰ “Akademicheskaya Mobil’nost’ Inostrannyx Studentov v Rossii”. *Fakty Obrazovaniya* 7 (July 2016). Moscow, NIU VShE’, 2016: 3-4.

³¹ Botagoz Rakisheva, *Molodezh’ Tsentral’noy Azii: Sravnitel’nyy Obzor Na osnove sotsiologicheskogo oprosa [Youth in Central Asia. A Comparative Overview Based on a Sociological Survey]* Almaty: Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Public Opinion Institute, 2017. Access Date: December 12, 2020, Retrieved from: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kasachstan/14109.pdf>

As for the links in the field of education, the same research revealed that the youngsters of the region wanted to study abroad rather than their home country and region. Within the framework of educational migration, the first preference of Kazakh youth was Russia (29.6%), then the USA (23.7%), the European countries (16.3%) and China (14.6%), while Kyrgyz youngsters preferred the USA (31.1%), Russia (26.0%), the EU countries (9.6%) and China (6.8%). While the majority of Tajik youngsters (43.2%) preferred to study in Russia, the rest preferred the USA (16.1%), China (8.3%), and the EU countries (7.7%). Similarly, while Uzbek youngsters preferred Russia (25.1%), the USA (18.8%), the EU countries (15.2%) and China (5.4%), unlike others, 5.7% of Uzbek youngsters preferred to study in South Korea. The rate of those who wanted to receive education in the countries of the region does not exceed 7%: 6.9% of Tajiks, 5.2% of Kazakhs, 4% of Uzbeks and 3.8% of Kyrgyz stated that they wanted to study in Central Asian countries.

Table 19.7. If you had the chance to study abroad, which country would you choose? (%)

Answer Options	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
Russia	29.6	26.0	42.2	25.1
USA	23.6	31.1	16.1	18.8
EU Countries	16.3	9.6	7.7	15.2
China	14.6	6.8	8.3	5.4
Central Asian Countries	5.2	3.8	6.9	4.0
South Korea	0.2	0.5	0.2	5.7
Turkey	0.2	1.7	0.6	-
Other	Malaysia -0.1 Singapore - 0.1	UAE- 0.7 Japan- 0.1 Canada -0.1	Canada-0.2 Germany-1.0 Iran- 0.7 Saudi A.- 0.6 UK- 0.2 India-0.1 Spain-0.1	-
None	0.6	-	0.6	18.5
No answer/I cannot answer	9.4	19.6	14.4	7.3
Total	100	100	100	100

As can be seen from the table, education-country preferences in the countries of the region reflect the positions of the “soft power” leaders and reinforce their advantageous positions in the region.

4. Conclusion

It is possible to say that in Central Asian countries in general, the USA, Russia and China are trying to develop educational and cultural ties. In addition to the USA, where the concept was first introduced, China and Russia are also aware of the importance of “soft power” and include this concept both in their foreign policy concepts and actively implement the policies prioritized by the concept. While China and Russia are actively using centrally managed educational and cultural centers, the USA uses different tools in this area. Under current circumstances, it is possible to say that Russia is benefiting from the common history and language advantages from the past and by adding the Eurasian perspective to these, is carrying out significant work for the future.

The most criticized aspect of the concept of “soft power” is how much of the investments made for the culture and education in the target countries are effective in achieving the foreign policy goals of the source country, that is, whether the soft power tools are efficient or bring about significant “turnout”. However, it should not be forgotten that the purposes of the use of soft power are not short and medium term. It is only after a few generations that soft power tools create the expected perception in the target country. A state’s maintaining a positive image, carrying out an active cultural policy, and organizing cultural events arouse interest in its own culture in the target country, as well as contribute to the development of economic and political contacts.³²

Established as a regional intergovernmental cooperation organization to support sustainable socio-economic growth in the region by the five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan), which were part of the USSR in the past, as well as Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, and Azerbaijan

³² Ainur Nogayeva ve Tolkyñ Akmurzina, “Kul’turnaja Politika Zapadnyh i Vostochnyh Stran: Uroki Dlya Kazahstana [“Cultural Policies of Eastern and Western Countries: Lessons for Kazakhstan”], (*Materialy Mezhdunarodnoj Nauchno-Teoreticheskoy Konferencii, Posvjashhennoj 90-Letiju Zasluzhennogo Dejatelja Nauki RK, Akademika NAN RK Zaki Ahmetova*, Astana, 15-16 May 2018), 264-268.

and Turkey, the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) can act within the framework of this aim and play an important role in strengthening and developing the educational and cultural networks between these countries.

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