

MAIN FACTORS OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The strengthening of China's soft power in Central Asia is believed to be closely associated with the process of Chinese language learning. Teaching and learning of the Chinese language in Central Asia began in the times of the Soviet Union. However, it has received a boost after the Central Asian states gained independence, in the context of the development of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic relations between China and Central Asia. Currently, there are two Chinese language learning models in the Central Asian countries:

1) in higher education institutions of Central Asian countries and in private training centers;

2) in Confucius Institutes and classes, as well as in Chinese Language Centers created by the Chinese government.

Confucius Institutes are not limited to teaching the Chinese language and culture only to students, they have already started teaching in the region's elite secondary schools and other educational and scientific institutions.

Confucius Institutes and classes, as governmental educational institutions of the PRC, are expanding their linguistic and cultural influence on the basis of state finances and technologies. This is facilitated by the development of trade and economic rela-

tions and entrepreneurship between China and Central Asia. Everywhere in the world Chinese enterprises prioritize candidates with knowledge of the Chinese language in employment. Confucius Institutes conduct the official Chinese language examination, as well as the “Chinese Bridge” competition, whose winners have the opportunity to receive a grant for further studies in China. This, in turn, attracts young people.

The activities of Confucius Institutes are mainly aimed at deepening the influence of Chinese culture among its students. As such, they are the drivers of China’s soft power policy. Together with Chinese multinational companies, Confucius Institutes have a great influence on the penetration of

Chinese culture into society through the celebration of Chinese national holidays and the presentation of traditional Chinese customs, songs, dances and poetry. Confucius Institutes exert cultural influence through their own Chinese language textbooks that promote traditional Chinese culture, as well as civilizational and value reference points.

To date, there are sufficient results of the implementation of China’s soft power policy. This situation causes public discontent and criticism of some experts. But the process of learning the Chinese language in Central Asia is bound to continue in the future. However, the region’s population will perceive various elements of Chinese culture in a more selective manner.

KEYWORDS: *Central Asia, soft power, Confucius Institute, Chinese language, cultural influence.*

Introduction

Central Asia comprises the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. This region connects the East and the West—the so-called Heartland, located between the North and the South. The English scientist Halford J. Mackinder (1861-1947) described The Heartland Theory (心脏地带) in the following manner: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world.”¹

American researcher Nicholas Spykman (1895-1943) believed that “Who controls the rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world.”²

In view of this, the struggle of the great powers for Central Asia has not stopped since antiquity. The great empires, ascending from the West, East, South and North, always sought to subjugate Central Asia, and they did succeed at times. Therefore, various civilizations have integrated in Central Asia, and regional cultural and national features have emerged. However, regional culture has not undergone any dramatic changes.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the struggle for the influence of great powers in Central Asia had intensified. Among them, China’s activities focus on Central Asia and the whole world. The impact of China’s soft power policy does not go unnoticed anywhere in the world; Central Asia is no exception. The study of China’s soft power in Central Asia and the factor of Chinese cultural interference is crucial for the formation of the region’s political cultural values. Which system will have greater power in the Central Asian countries when the con-

¹ H.J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals Reality*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1942, p. 62.

² N.J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace*, Harcourt Brace Co., New York, 1944, p. 43.

traditions between the Eastern, proper Chinese totalitarian system and Western democratic values intensify? Which vector of development will the Central Asian countries adopt? The theoretical and practical value of this study is very high.

Despite the importance of this topic, fundamental monographs systematically analyzing the influence of China's soft power in the region have not yet been published in Central Asia. Of course, each country's media publishes articles related to certain aspects of this issue. However, they do not cover the entire process of China's soft power policy in Central Asia and the true state of Chinese cultural influence. In connection with the above, an attempt is made to analyze this topic using the theory and methodology of international relations, as well as cultural integration, based on agreements signed between China and Central Asian states in the educational sphere, using Confucius Institutes and classes as an example.

Penetration of China's Soft Power in Central Asia

The influence of China's soft power in Central Asia began with the spread of the Chinese language and culture, and this process gradually leads young people to assimilate Chinese values. There are two different vectors of the Chinese language teaching in Central Asia. One of them includes local higher education institutions and private language centers. The second is the Confucius Institutes and classes.

First, let us examine the Chinese language learning processes at Central Asian universities. There is a long history of the relations between China and Central Asia, which have at times been interrupted and resumed. Following the collapse of the U.S.S.R. in 1991, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan gained independence and established diplomatic relations with China. Since then, relations between China and Central Asian states have entered a new era of historical development.

During an official visit to Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan in April 1994, Prime Minister Li Peng announced the principles of China's foreign policy towards Central Asian countries for the first time. According to Li Peng, "China and the Central Asian states have established friendly and good-neighborly relations, contributing to common prosperity, respecting each country's own choice of development path, adhering to the principle of non-interference in internal affairs, respecting sovereignty and protecting the stability of the region."³ The visit of the Chinese prime minister gave a new impetus to the development of relations between China and the Central Asian states. Simultaneously, bilateral trade relations began to take shape.

China has focused on trade and economic relations with the Central Asian countries, paying attention to soft power, the development of ties in the educational sphere, and culture in particular. In turn, the Central Asian countries were interested in developing broader ties with China to overcome the economic downturn. Since dialog and intercultural communications are the foundation of cultural ties, this marked the penetration of China's soft power into Central Asian countries.

The Central Asian countries were no strangers to the Chinese language. In Soviet times, it was taught in Uzbekistan. Moreover, Tashkent was home to one of the strongest oriental studies schools

³ Ж. Кәріпжанов, Н. Мұқаметханұлы, *Қытайдың сыртқы саясаты және Қазақстанмен қатынасы (2000-2010 жылдар)*, Қазақ университеті, Almaty, 2013, 180 б. (Zh. Karipzhanov, N. Mukhametkhanuly, *Chinese Foreign Policy and Relations with Kazakhstan (2000-2010)*, Қазақ университеті, Almaty, 2013. 180 pp.)

in the U.S.S.R. The Chinese language was taught at the Institute of Oriental Studies at Tashkent State University and secondary school No. 59 in Tashkent.⁴

In Kazakhstan, the teaching of the Chinese language also began in the Soviet period. In 1989, at the S.M. Kirov Kazakh State University (currently Al-Farabi Kazakh National University) was opened an Oriental Studies Department, which taught Arabic, Chinese and Persian languages. After gaining independence, the teaching of the Chinese language had expanded in connection with the establishment of cooperation between Chinese and Kazakhstani universities.

Soon, due to the comprehensive development of Kazakh-Chinese relations and increased demand from the society, Chinese language departments were opened at the leading universities of Kazakhstan, and Chinese was taught there in a systematic manner. In particular, Chinese is taught as the main or second foreign language at the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University, Ablai Khan University of International Relations and World Languages, Abay Kazakh National Pedagogical University, Kazakh State Women's University, and S. Demirel University.

On 31 August, 2016, the Center for Chinese Literature and Culture was opened at the National Library in Almaty, to which 7,200 books were delivered from China.⁵

In Uzbekistan, Chinese is currently taught at the Tashkent Institute of Oriental Studies and the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages.

Prior to 2017, four universities in Kyrgyzstan received a state license to teach the Chinese language. In the same year, nine institutions were already licensed to teach Chinese. Chinese language schools are available in all areas of the Kyrgyz Republic except the Talas Region.⁶

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Kyrgyz Republic, the Chinese language is currently taught at seven of the country's major universities: Bishkek University of the Humanities, Balasagun Kyrgyz National University, Arabaev Kyrgyz State University, Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University, Naryn State University, Osh State University and Osh Humanitarian Pedagogical Institute.

The main educational institution that trains Chinese language specialists in Tajikistan is the Tajik State Institute of Foreign Languages, which has been teaching Chinese since 2000. A separate Chinese language department was established in 2009. Computer science majors here also study the Chinese language. In addition, Chinese is taught in numerous language courses licensed by the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan.⁷

Turkmenistan was the last among the countries of Central Asia to launch the teaching of Chinese. In 2015, with the development of cooperation with China in the oil and gas industry, Chinese began to be taught as an additional subject for students studying economics and oil and gas engineering at the Turkmen State Institute of Economics and Management and the International University of Oil and Gas.

Since 2016, the Chinese language has been taught as a second foreign language at six schools in Ashgabad, at five schools in the Balkan province, at three schools in Lebap, as well as at two schools in each of the Akhal, Dashaguz and Mary provinces.⁸

⁴ See: A. Nogayeva, "Limitations of Chinese 'Soft Power' in its Population and Language Policies in Central Asia," *Geopolitics*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2015, pp. 583-605, available at [DOI: 10.1080/14650045.2015.1034272].

⁵ See: I. Akchurin, A. Kusainov, V. Shishko, "V Almaty poiavilsia Tsentri kulture i literatury Kitaia," Arna Press, 31 August, 2016, available at [http://www.arnapress.kz/almaty/culture/79666/], 24 February, 2019.

⁶ See: S. Shamshiev, "Kitayskiy iazyk v Kyrgyzstane: est spros," 24 kg, 20 April, 2017, available at [https://24.kg/obshchestvo/49864_kitayskiy_azyk_v_kyrgyzstane_est_spros/], 24 February, 2019.

⁷ See: A. Mannonov, "Ia kitayskiy by vyuchil tolko za to...", *Asia-Plus*, 11 February, 2017, available at [https://news.tj/ru/news/tajikistan/society/20170211/ya-kitaiskii-bi-viuchil-tolko-za-to], 24 February, 2019.

⁸ See: "S novogo uchebnogo goda v riade shkol i vuzov vvodiatsia kitayskiy i iaponskiy iazyki," *Turkmenistan: zolotoy vek*, 27 November, 2015, available at [http://turkmenistan.gov.tm/?id=9998], 24 February, 2019.

The above facts demonstrate that over the past twenty years, the teaching of the Chinese language in Central Asia has been developing rapidly. This contributes to a high level of motivation to learn the Chinese language: the expansion of relations between China and Central Asia, which entails an increased interest in communicating with the Chinese people, understanding of the Chinese language and Chinese culture, and a rise in the number of people wishing to get a well-paid job using the Chinese language. In accordance with these social needs, the Chinese government provides financial, technical and teaching assistance in the process of learning the Chinese language in Central Asia. Thanks to these internal and external factors, China has gained a great opportunity to spread its soft power in the region.

Establishment of Confucius Institutes and Manifestation of China's Soft Power Influence

In the 21st century, the influence of China's soft power grew in Central Asian states, reflecting China's efforts to intensify its soft power policy around the world. In the new century, the Chinese government took a new step in its soft power politics and placed greater emphasis on the spread of the Chinese language and culture around the world. Confucius Institutes and classes became the flagship of China's soft power in the international arena.

In 2002, the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban, 国家汉办) under the Ministry of Education of the PRC began to create a network of international cultural and educational centers (Confucius Institutes) in many countries of the world.

In 2004, a draft prepared jointly by the Ministry of Education of China and Hanban was approved by the 4th plenary meeting of the 16th Congress of the CPC Central Committee.

In the summer of 2004, the first experimental CI in Central Asia was opened in Tashkent.⁹ In the same year, the first official Confucius Institute was established in Seoul, the capital of South Korea. In May 2005, the official opening of the Confucius Institute took place in Uzbekistan. The Institute was established at the Tashkent Institute of Oriental Studies in cooperation with the Lanzhou University on the Chinese side. Later, this institution was recognized as the "Best CI in the world."¹⁰

At the 17th Congress of the CPC in October 2007, the spread of the Chinese language and culture in foreign countries was identified as an important part of China's soft power foreign policy. As a result, China began to further cultivate the teaching and dissemination of the Chinese language in Central Asia.

On 3 December, 2014, the second Confucius Institute in Uzbekistan was established at the Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages. The opinion of an anonymous Uzbek expert who commented on the opening of this institute in an interview with the Regnum news agency provides food for thought: Only two countries offer free university education to citizens of Uzbekistan—Russia and China. The Chinese side not only finances the students' studies and dormitory stays, but also provides them with two meals a day. China increases the number of such grants at its higher education

⁹ See: A. Alikberova, "Gumanitarnaia ekspansia KNR na primere funktsionirovaniia Institutov Konfutsia v Rossii," *Materials of XI International Research and Practical Conference "Modern European Science—2014"*, Vol. 5, Sheffield, UK, 2014, pp. 3-8.

¹⁰ A. Nogayeva, op. cit.

institutions on an annual basis. This means that China is not only penetrating our country's economy, but is also struggling to capture the minds of our youth.¹¹

It is not difficult to determine the purpose of this generous act towards other states on the part of the Chinese government, while millions of young people in rural China itself cannot afford to go to school and get an education because of extreme poverty.

The process of opening Confucius Institutes in Uzbekistan is still ongoing. In 2018, a Memorandum on the Establishment of the Confucius Institute at the Tashkent State Agrarian University was signed together with the Xinjiang Agricultural University. The aim of the institute is to provide students with the opportunity to study in China in agricultural specialties; develop academic mobility of students and teachers; as well as establish cooperation in the agricultural research sphere.¹²

Although the establishment of Confucius Institutes in Kazakhstan began later than in Uzbekistan, the process has been much quicker and broader. For instance, a Confucius Institute was established at the L.N. Gumilev Eurasian National University on 5 December, 2007 in Astana. The Minister of Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Zhansait Tuimebayev, and the Ambassador of the People's Republic of China in Kazakhstan, Zhang Xun, gave welcoming addresses at the opening ceremony.¹³

In 2004, the Chinese Language Center was opened at the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, and in 2009 it was reorganized into a Confucius Institute.¹⁴

In June 2011, the third Confucius Institute in Kazakhstan was opened at the Aktobe State Pedagogical Institute.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, the chief advisor to the Chinese ambassador to Kazakhstan, Cheng Hong, said: "About a quarter of the people on earth speak Chinese. Knowledge of Chinese is like a window into the modern world. The youth of Kazakhstan is very much interested in learning the Chinese language and culture. Chinese students also seek to learn the Kazakh language."¹⁵

On 27 November, 2012, the fourth Confucius Institute was established at the Karaganda State Technical University.¹⁶

On 19 April, 2017 the Ablai Khan Kazakh University of International Relations and World Languages, together with Southwestern University of China, opened the fifth Confucius Institute in Kazakhstan.¹⁷

The Chinese Embassy in Kazakhstan is very active in establishing additional Confucius Institutes in the country. Many applications to Hanban are still pending. For example, in 2015, a memorandum was signed to establish one more CI in Astana by the Saken Seifullin Kazakh Agro-Technical University and Xinjiang Agrarian University, which will train specialists in the agricultural sphere. The Chinese side intends to invest \$80,000 annually in financing the institute.¹⁸

¹¹ See: "V Uzbekistane otkrylsia vtoroy 'Institut Konfutsia'," Regnum Information Agency, 3 December, 2014, available at [<https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1872801.html>], 24 February, 2019.

¹² See: "V Uzbekistane otkroiut filial instituta Konfutsia," repost.uz, 7 February, 2018, available at [<https://repost.uz/Uzbekistan-Konfuciy/>], 24 February, 2019.

¹³ See: "V Kazakhstane v 2011 godu otkroiutsia eshche dva instituta Konfutsia," Tengrinews.kz, 8 June, 2011, available at [https://tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/kazakhstan-2011-godu-otkroyutsya-dva-instituta-konfutsiya-190026/], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁴ See: "Institut Konfutsia," kaznu.kz, available at [<http://www.kaznu.kz/kz/14355/page>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁵ A. Aktleuov, "V Aktobe otkrylsia Institut Konfutsia," Diapazon, 30 June, 2011, available at [<http://www.diapazon.kz/aktobe/aktobe-city/38618-v-aktobe-otkrylsja-institut-konfucija.html>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁶ See: "V kazakhstanskom gorode Karaganda sostoialas tseremoniia otkrytiia novogo Instituta Konfutsia," Russian.cri.cn, 29 November, 2012, available at [<http://russian.cri.cn/1281/2012/11/29/1s450182.htm>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁷ See: "Institut Konfutsia," ablaikhan.kz, available at [<http://www.ablaikhan.kz/ru/about-us/our-university/news/university-news/1032.html>], 24 February, 2019.

¹⁸ See: D. Plotnikov, "'Miagkaya sila' KNR v Tsentralnoy Azii," Mir Evrazii, 20 January, 2016, available at [<http://wef.kz/monitoring/myagkaya-sila-kr-v-tsentral-noj-azii/>] 25 February, 2019.

In November 2016, the rector of Sh. Ualikhanov Kokshetau State University and representatives of the Confucius Institute in Urumqi signed an agreement on the opening of a Confucius Institute at Kokshetau University.¹⁹ Thus, new Confucius Institutes may open in Kazakhstan in the future.

The opening of Confucius Institutes in Kyrgyzstan was agreed upon on the eve of the SCO summit in Bishkek in 2007, during the visit of former Chinese President Hu Jintao to Kyrgyzstan.

At a meeting of the Minister of Education and Science of Kyrgyzstan Ishenkul Bolzhurova and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China in Kyrgyzstan Zhang Yannian in 2008, an agreement was reached on the establishment of two Confucius Institutes at two Kyrgyz universities—Jusip Balasagun Kyrgyz State University and Kusain Karasaev Bishkek Humanitarian University.²⁰

The third Confucius Institute in Kyrgyzstan was opened in 2013 at Osh State University in southern Kyrgyzstan. In addition, there are clubs functioning in the country, such as kung fu, calligraphy, Chinese art of painting and playing the traditional Chinese musical instrument *guzhen*.²¹

The fourth Confucius Institute in Kyrgyzstan was opened at the end of 2016 at the University of Dzhahal-Abad. The agreement was signed by the rector of Dzhahal-Abad University Akunyan Abdrashev and the director of the CI headquarters Xu Lin.²²

In 2015, the Kyrgyz State Academy of Management and the Confucius Institute signed a Memorandum of Cooperation and created the Chinese Culture and Education Center.²³

According to the 2016 Hanban report, the State Chancellery recognized the Confucius Institute at the Kusain Karasaev Bishkek Humanitarian University in Kyrgyzstan as the best CI in the world.²⁴

The establishment of Confucius Institutes in Tajikistan was launched in accordance with the SCO framework agreement. In 2009, the first Confucius Institute was established at the Tajik National University. The agreement to open the institution was reached during the official visit of President Hu Jintao to Tajikistan in 2008. The second Confucius Institute was established in August 2015 by the China Petroleum University together with the Tajik Mining and Metallurgical Institute in Chkalovsk, Sogd Region. Along with the teaching of the Chinese language, the institute trains mining and oil industries specialists.²⁵

On the 10th anniversary of the establishment of the Confucius Institute in Dushanbe, Chinese Ambassador to Tajikistan Yue Bin said: “The Confucius Institute at the Tajik National University has made great strides over the years.”

According to Nosim Muhammadiyev, director of the Confucius Institute at Tajik National University, “over the eight years of the Institute’s work, 566 students and 197 teachers went to study in China under the state quota in order to increase their knowledge of the Chinese language and culture.”²⁶

¹⁹ See: R. Bekov, “Shkola Konfutsia otkroetsia v KGU im. Sh. Ualikhanova,” *apgazeta.kz*, 28 November, 2016, available at [<http://apgazeta.kz/2016/11/28/shkola-konfuciya-otkroetsya-v-kgu-im-sh-ualixanova/>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁰ See: Zh. Askarbekyzy, “Institut Konfutsia novyye perspektivy,” *siluxgc.com*, 9 August, 2017, available at [<http://ru.siluxgc.com/html/R1413/201708/8548660212126673931211.shtml>], 25 February, 2019.

²¹ See: “Institut Konfutsia sozdaet perspektivnoe budushchee dlia studentov Kyrgyzstana,” *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 8 July, 2017, available at [<http://slovo.kg/?p=76715>], 25 February, 2019.

²² See: “V Kyrgyzstane otkroetsia chetvertyy po schetu Institut Konfutsia,” *KazTAG*, 21 April, 2016, available at [<https://kaztag.kz/ru/news/v-kyrgyzstane-otkroetsya-chetvertyy-po-schetu-institut-konfutsiya>], 25 February, 2019.

²³ See: D. Plotnikov, *op.cit.*

²⁴ See: “Institut Konfutsia BGU priznan organizatsiey goda v globalnoy seti institutov Konfutsia mira,” *AKI Press*, 14 December, 2016, available at [<http://kg.akipress.org/news:1351005>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁵ See: “V Tadzhikestane otkrylsia vtoroy Institut Konfutsia,” *Sputnik Tajikiston*, 21 August, 2015, available at [<https://ru.sputnik-tj.com/education/20150821/1016503961.html>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁶ “V Dushanbe otmetili Den Instituta Konfutsia,” *Asia-Plus*, 29 September, 2016, available at [<http://news.tj/ru/news/life/culture/20160929/v-dushanbe-otmetili-den-instituta-konfutsiya>], 25 February, 2019.

The number of registered students has reached 3,000. Confucius Institute is publishing a collection of 24 translation and study materials for Tajik students and teachers.”²⁷

To date, 25 Chinese language and cultural educational centers have been created.

The only country in the Central Asian region where a Confucius Institute has not been opened is Turkmenistan. Former Chinese President Hu Jintao proposed establishing a Confucius Institute during his visit to Ashgabad in 2008, but the institute has not yet been opened.

There is a total of 13 Confucius Institutes established in Central Asian countries, with 5 of them in Kazakhstan, 2 in Uzbekistan, 4 in Kyrgyzstan, and 2 in Tajikistan. In addition, there are 12 Confucius classes, all located in Kyrgyzstan.

The number of Confucius Institutes and classes per capita in Central Asian countries is greater than in the rest of the world. Obviously, the Chinese government did not plan to establish Confucius Institutes based on the world’s population. Apparently, China adheres to the principle of “the more, the better” as far as establishing the Institutes. Moreover, economically weak countries are more active in establishing Confucius Institutes.

Since Confucius Institutes are state institutions of the PRC, language and culture textbooks and additional study guides, as well as the study programs, are approved by the Chinese government.

In order to promote Chinese culture, these institutions organize events such as the Oratory Competition, the Chinese Language and Song Contest among students and teachers, the International Education Festival and World Confucius Institute Day. As part of such celebrations, events are regularly held to promote the in-depth penetration of Chinese culture. Such events established comprehensive conditions for recreating the atmosphere of Chinese culture, and the influence of these centers is growing with every passing day.

During the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the founding of international CI, dedicated to the 5th anniversary of the institute in Kyrgyzstan, the director of CI Umut Kultaeva said: “Today, the demand for the Chinese language is growing all over the world, Kyrgyzstan included. In the past, the number of people wishing to pass the Chinese language exam barely reached 30 people. Today, over a thousand people are involved. The Chinese government is providing substantial financial support to the Kyrgyz education sector.”²⁸

According to the positive dynamics in the number of Confucius Institutes and classes and students studying the Chinese language, we can safely say that the influence of China’s soft power in the countries of Central Asia is growing every year.

Penetration of China’s Soft Power in Central Asian Countries

An increase in the number of Confucius Institutes means an increase in the number of students studying there. A large number of students studying the Chinese language and culture marks a surge in the number of young people who accept the Chinese culture, and, moreover, share the cultural values of the Celestial Empire. That is the reason why the Chinese government is working to expand the range of Chinese language teaching services for both young people and adults, as well as for academic, technical, industrial, agricultural workers and engineers. Together with educational and gov-

²⁷ Li Cai, “Po sravneniiu s Evropoy i Amerikoy, Sredniaia Azia bolshe nuzhdaetsia v Institute Konfutsia,” *siluxge.com*, 13 April, 2017, available at [<http://ru.siluxge.com/html/R1653/201704/75449315330354560548.shtml>], 25 February, 2019.

²⁸ “Pervomu Institutu Konfutsia v Kyrgyzstane ispolnilos 5 let,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 16 May, 2014, available at [https://www.vb.kg/doc/273208_pervomy_instituty_konfycia_v_kyrgyzstane_ispolnilos_5_let.html], 25 February, 2019.

ernment institutions, various public organizations and associations, China plans to establish bilateral institutions for joint management and effective coordination of cooperation in the educational sphere.²⁹

Therefore, cultural influence on the Central Asian region is just as important for China as trade and economic influence.

The activities of the Confucius Institutes established by China in Central Asia have already begun to produce results. Over the past decades, the number of persons who speak Chinese, understand Chinese culture and have a Chinese education in Central Asian countries has been growing. In addition, more and more people consciously and unconsciously perceive Chinese culture as non-alien.

Among them, there are young people who associate their future careers, employment and sources of income with China. Since the Chinese language and culture are closely related to trade, economic and business cooperation, it only seems like the natural outcome.

China utilizes Confucius Institutes to strengthen its cultural influence in Central Asia, using the geographical coverage method. For example, CIs in Kazakhstan are located in the east and west, in the south and north, like chess pieces. In Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan they are positioned in large cities.

The Chinese government has begun teaching the Chinese language at the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools, which are shaping the future elite of Kazakhstan today. It is currently being taught at the Nazarbayev Intellectual School in Aktobe.

Why are universities in Kazakhstan open to the establishment of CI? Because the Chinese government incurs all financial expenses for maintaining the office, outfitting classrooms with the required technical equipment and textbooks, and the salaries of teachers and directors invited from China. Thus, the host partner countries do not face any funding issues, on the contrary, they benefit greatly from the establishment of such institutions. The most urgent issue is to raise the position of educational institutions in national and international ratings as far as the development of external relations is concerned. No institution can reject such financial injections and the opportunity to improve its reputation. These are the mechanism and criteria for evaluating educational institutions that are accepted in the international educational space. Why is China spending a huge amount of funds and resources to spread its culture, language and civilizational values? Questions of this sort are not posed, and the long-term results of this policy are not being examined, since the universities are satisfied with the temporary benefits provided by CI.

The Chinese government has created an exam certification system (HSK), which determines the level of non-native speakers' knowledge of the Chinese language. Applicants must take the exam preparation course at the CI. After their level of language proficiency is determined, they have the opportunity to receive a grant to study in China. This current system and criteria push students to study Chinese language and culture at a high level.

There is a growing number of people who are skeptical about the process of intensive dissemination of the Chinese language and culture in society. The issue of "Chinese language being illegally taught in Almaty schools" arose, causing great resonance in society in the fall of 2011, in the Almaty "Language Protection" program. Parents said that along with the Kazakh, Russian and English languages taught under the state program, Chinese, which is not included in the official program and is an extra burden for the children, is also being taught. The argument was taken into account, and the teaching of Chinese in schools was discontinued.

However, the Chinese language is still being taught in some secondary schools.³⁰

²⁹ See: A. Nogayeva, *op. cit.*

³⁰ See: "Алматы мектептері қытай тілін заңсыз оқытып жүр // Nur.kz, 26 октября 2011, available at [<https://www.nur.kz/199220-almaty-mektepteri-kytaj-tilin-zansyz-okytyp-zhyr.html>], 25 February, 2019. ("Schools in Almaty Teach Chinese without any Permission," Nur.kz, 26 October, 2011, available at [<https://www.nur.kz/199220-almaty-mektepteri-kytaj-tilin-zansyz-okytyp-zhyr.html>], 25 February, 2019.

Every year, the number of students studying the Chinese language in Kazakhstani universities is growing. The reason for this is the increase in the number of educational grants provided by the Chinese government through the CI. The number of students who receive grants through various Chinese projects, as well as study in China at their own expense, is also growing. According to some estimates, in 2012, 9,565 Kazakh students were studying at Chinese universities, in 2014 their number reached 11,764 students,³¹ and in 2018, this number went up to 17,000.

In November 2017, the Consul General of China in Almaty, Zhang Wei, told BNews.kz that about 14,000 Kazakhs were studying in China. Speaking about young people's interest in learning the Chinese language, the Consul General noted: "This interest is associated with future opportunities for young people. They see that the relations between the two countries are very promising, and they will have great future career prospects. This trend primarily emerged due to the rapid development of relations between the two countries, and has intensified even more after the announcement of the Belt and Road project. For us, the implementation of this project is a foremost priority, and a multilateral partnership has been established between the two countries."³²

This statement is justified, because in his speech at the Nazarbayev University Chinese President Xi Jinping, who first visited Astana during his trip to Central Asia in September 2013, proposed "to create a joint Silk Road Economic Belt" and announced that this project will annually provide 30,000 grants for studying in China.³³

2019 was marked by the 30th anniversary of the teaching of the Chinese language in Kazakhstan. Today in Kazakhstan, Chinese language and culture are taught in public and private higher education institutions, colleges, centers for foreign language studies and at Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools. In 2018, with the support of the Consulate General of China, a Chinese language school called Umit also opened in Almaty. No one has analyzed whether the curriculum at such schools corresponds to the state program of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The number of Kazakhstani youth studying the Chinese language through grants in China and at their own expense is increasing. However, taking into account that more than 95% of them major in "Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language" (*dui wai han yu*), they have difficulties finding a job in their sphere, since they return from China solely with the knowledge of the Chinese language, but without a particular profession. If our state does not take steps to resolve this problem, it is not China's intention to deal with it.

This phenomenon exists in all Central Asian states. Worried that Confucius Institutes and classes are expanding every year, scientists began to sound the alarm; publications and articles have appeared that analyze this problem. In addition, the Chinese government expanded the influence of language and culture from civilian to military sphere. For example, in April 2006, a language center was opened at the Ministry of Defense of Kazakhstan, where the teaching of the Chinese language began. The Chinese military attaché in Kazakhstan declared China's readiness to provide assistance in the amount of \$3 million to the Armed Forces of Kazakhstan.³⁴ Undoubtedly, China intends to attract the best cadets to study in China under state grants, where China-centric values and principles will be universally and unobtrusively introduced into their minds.

³¹ "2014 nian quan guo lai hua liu xue sheng shu ji tun ji," Zhonghua Renmin Gong he guo Jiao yu bu ("National Statistics of Foreign Students in 2014," Ministry of Education of the PRC), available at [http://www.moe.gov.cn/jyb_xwfb/gzdt_gzdt/s5987/201503/t20150318_186395.html], 25 February, 2019.

³² A. Mukhambetova, "Pochemu kazakhstanskiye studenty edut na uchebu v Kitay, rasskazal konsul KNR v Almaty," bnews.kz, 14 November, 2014, available at [https://bnews.kz/ru/news/pochemu_kazahstanskije_studentsi_edut_na_uchebu_v_kitai_rasskazal_konsul_knr_v_almati].

³³ See: "Ukrepliat družbu narodov, vmeste otkryt svetloe budushchee. Vystuplenie Predsedatelya KNR Si Tszinpinga v Nazarbayev universitete," 16 September, 2013, available at [kz.china-embassy.org/rus/ztbd/XJPFWHSKST/t1077192.htm].

³⁴ See: Yu. Yakusheva, "Kitayskiy yazyk—delo gosudarstvennoy vazhnosti," ia-centr.ru, 13 November, 2007, available at [http://www.ia-centr.ru/archive/public_detailse1ca.html?id=983], 25 February, 2019.

Kyrgyz sociologist Mukanmediy Asanbekov revealed the consequences of China’s economic and cultural expansion for Kyrgyzstan in an analytical paper. According to him, “China has made great strides in spreading its language and culture in Kyrgyzstan. Its influence has grown so much that China is trying to turn Chinese into an industry language in Kyrgyzstan.”³⁵

For instance, the Kara-Balta refinery made a decision to only hire personnel fluent in Chinese, or those who have completed a special course in Chinese language. It is likely that when the Chinese investment in industry and production increases to 30% and continues to grow, there will be an influx of Chinese migrant workers and the emergence of the Chinese language as one of the key industry languages. The Chinese language was taught so well that the locals who work in Chinese enterprises and in institutions with Chinese equity or capital are fluent in it. Currently, given the growing interest in learning Chinese among the country’s youth, it is certain that China will achieve its goals. There are over 50 Chinese language centers in the city of Bishkek alone, 3,500 students study Chinese at higher educational institutions, more than 1,000 study in China or have taken various language courses.

The influence of the Chinese language and culture in Kyrgyzstan has become apparent in the public sphere. The researcher believes that Chinese culture is rapidly spreading in Kyrgyzstan along with Chinese goods. In particular, this phenomenon is noticeable in the service sector. Many Chinese culinary habits and rituals have been mastered by local residents. Increasingly greater numbers of diverse Chinese-style entertainment centers, cafes, restaurants and bars are becoming popular every day. Today, it has become common practice to celebrate traditional Chinese holidays in enterprises with Chinese participation and in educational institutions. The traditional Chinese New Year is also becoming a regular holiday. Chinese traditional martial arts and traditional Chinese medicine are the key to Chinese traditions and lifestyle. In short, the influence of Chinese culture in Kyrgyzstan is especially significant.

Undoubtedly, the influence of Chinese culture is apparent not only in Kyrgyzstan, but throughout Central Asia. Attributes of Chinese culture, i.e., traditional Chinese medicine, kung fu art, and Chinese cuisine are very popular among locals. It can be argued that the cultural influence of China in Kyrgyzstan is deeper than in other Central Asian countries.

Chinese language learning is most effective when it takes place in China, when a student is immersed in the cultural and language environment (see Table 1).

Table 1

Number of Central Asian Students Studying in China in 2000-2016

Year	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
2000	105	46	47	21
2001	109	58	53	20
2002	200	74	70	28
2003	215	70	72	29
2004	386	176	129	40
2005	781	109	248	66
2006	1,825	244	562	140

³⁵ M. Asanbekov, “Preodolenie negativnykh posledstviy evoliutsii interesov Kitaia—vazhneyshee uslovie sokhraneniia ustoychivosti politicheskikh protsessov v Kyrgyzstane,” *Vremya Vostoka*, 8 мая 2014.

Table 1 (continued)

Year	Kazakhstan	Uzbekistan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan
2007	3,827	340	1,157	332
2008	5,666	467	1,324	554
2009	6,497	582	1,283	539
2010	7,874	764	1,441	923
2011	8,287	996	1,901	1,189
2012	9,565	1,347	2,513	1,398
2013	11,165	1,805	3,115	1,944
2014	11,764	2,192	3,063	2,015
2015	13,198	2,450	3,232	2,309
2016	13,996	3,129	3,247	2,606

These quantitative data show Kazakhstan's priorities. Kazakhstan is not only ahead of the other Central Asian countries, but is also likely to be among world leaders in this regard, if calculated per capita.

There are different opinions of this phenomenon. Some insist that these bilateral relations lead to positive results, while others refute this entirely. According to the Russian scientist Dmitry Plotnikov, the incompatible economic and demographic imbalance between China and Central Asian states can lead to major changes in the region. Central Asian states, which share borders with the PRC or are located near it, have a disproportionately small force and capabilities, and are at a disadvantage as a result. China's investment and infrastructure can stimulate the region's economy, but Beijing seeks to satisfy its economic interests rather than support business development in the region.³⁶

It seems that besides economic interests, there is also a threat that national values and the role of the state in the Central Asia countries may shift under the influence of China's soft power.

Conclusion

China's political/diplomatic, trade/economic and educational/cultural relations with the Central Asian states officially began in 1992. Despite the short historical period in question, the development of bilateral and multilateral relations was intense, which can be attributed to the parties' shared interest, complementarity of their economies and China's foreign policy.

The expansion of Chinese cultural influence and the deepening of China's soft power policy in Central Asia stem from China's ubiquitously expanding political and economic influence in the region. After gaining independence, studies of the Chinese language in Central Asian countries developed in accordance with public demand. China's soft power increased significantly after the implementation of China's foreign language policy and the opening of Confucius Institutes and classes in Central Asia.

³⁶ See: D. Plotnikov, *op. cit.*

The spread of the Chinese language in Central Asia can be roughly divided into three stages.

- The first stage falls on the late 1990s-early 2000s, which coincides with the beginning of the study of the Chinese language and the first contacts with Chinese educational institutions.
- The second stage lasted from 2007 to 2013. At the 17th Congress of the CPC in October 2007, the spread of the Chinese language and culture in foreign countries was identified as an important part of China's soft power foreign policy. As a result, China began to cultivate the soft power factors in Central Asia even more actively. This is when Confucius Institutes and classes in Central Asia became increasingly common.
- The third stage was marked by China's proclamation of the Belt and Road initiative. In September 2013, during his first visit to Central Asia, Chinese President Xi Jinping launched the "Creating a New Silk Road Economic Zone" initiative and announced that students from the countries along the Silk Road will receive 30,000 grants per year to study in China. In this regard, cooperation between China and Central Asian states has reached a new level, bolstering the influence of China's soft power in the region.

The establishment of Confucius Institutes and classes, as well as Chinese language learning centers is a modern Chinese project funded by the state and managed by it. Therefore, the Chinese government is not limited to providing material assistance to Chinese language departments and centers in regional higher educational institutions; it also seeks to penetrate both the elite and regular secondary schools. Chinese language training is extended to scientists, specialists, and administrative personnel of enterprises at various levels. This is a manifestation of the strengthening of China's soft power policy in the region.

Today, the processes of globalization and internationalization of education throughout the world contribute to the spread of the Chinese language and culture both in Central Asia and beyond. Since international cooperation is one of the main criteria for evaluating universities' activities by international rating agencies, university leaders in Central Asia are inclined to establish Confucius institutions and classes. However, a comprehensive analysis of the long-term consequences of this trend has yet to be carried out.

The increasing influence of Chinese culture in Central Asia is a dangerous trend that is apparent today. Such accomplishments of the Chinese civilization as traditional Chinese medicine, kung fu and national cuisine were positively received by local residents, while universal and cultural values were ignored, or often even rejected by the peoples of Central Asia. Confucius' humanistic doctrine of "mercy" has not yet spread to Central Asia, because the Chinese themselves do not exhibit these qualities.

Currently, there is a tendency in developed countries to criticize and even close down Confucius Institutes. However, their development trend in Central Asia is stable and positive.

Beijing authorities urge to learn Chinese by "linking the hearts of peoples" (*minxin xiangtong*). In addition, some heads of Central Asian states praise the Chinese language as one of the official languages of the U.N. Thus, the process of teaching the Chinese language in Central Asia will grow and develop. However, the people of the region are still inclined to perceive Chinese culture selectively, through the prism of their national-cultural identity. Moreover, since these countries' national languages are relatively successful in playing the role of the state language, there is no reason to worry that the complex Chinese language will prevail in the region. It is hoped that the Chinese language and elements of Chinese culture will be perceived by our youth in a nuanced manner, critically and analytically.