

<sup>1</sup>Aldabek.N.  <sup>2</sup>Makhmudova A. 

<sup>1,2</sup> Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>Aldabek.Nurzhamal@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>makhmudovaaziza01@gmail.com

## SOFT POWER AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR THE FORMATION AND PROMOTION OF CHINESE POLITICAL CULTURE

**Abstract.** The article examines the concept of soft power in the context of Chinese political culture and its significance. The main focus is on the adaptation and transformation of the concept of soft power in China's political strategy, as well as its role in promoting the country's interests in the international arena. The novelty of the study is a comprehensive analysis of the use of soft power in Chinese political culture, focusing on the country's traditional values, the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, the activities of Confucius Institutes, and interaction with modern tools such as digital technologies. The purpose of the study is to identify the features of China's use of soft power and assess its effectiveness in the context of geopolitical processes. The main objectives of our study are to study the theoretical foundations of the concept of soft power and its adaptation in Chinese political culture; analyze the main tools of China's soft power; assess the results of the use of soft power in the international arena; identify the main difficulties and limitations of the use of soft power in China's strategy. The research methods include the analysis of official documents, strategies, media sources, and a comparative analysis of the works of researchers devoted to the concept of soft power. The results of the study show that China actively uses soft power to strengthen its international image and expand its influence. The article identifies both successful examples of the implementation of soft power and the difficulties associated with its perception by the international community.

**Key words:** soft power, Chinese political culture, international influence, "One Belt, One Road" initiative, Confucius Institutes, digital diplomacy, geopolitics, cultural policy.

### Introduction

In the context of globalization, countries are increasingly resorting to non-violent forms of influence, seeking not only to advance their interests, but also to create a positive image in the international arena. The concept of soft power, first formulated by Joseph Nye (2004, p. 5), became the basis for understanding how cultural, educational, and diplomatic tools can help expand geopolitical influence without resorting to military or economic coercion.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is actively developing its unique soft power model by implementing traditional cultural values, modern technologies, and international cooperation initiatives. Thus, China uses soft power as a comprehensive approach that becomes part of the overall political culture, encompassing both domestic and foreign directions. One of its main directions is the "Belt and Road" initiative, which is considered not only as an economic project, but also as a means of cultural exchange and diplomatic interaction (Zhao, 2015: 42). However, the resulting success of China's soft power is mixed. On the one hand, its main tools - Confucius Institutes, digital diplomacy, and cultural policy - allow it to raise the country's positive image. On the other hand, the international community has begun to criticize and fear these efforts as politically motivated, which makes it difficult to perceive China as a "friendly partner" (Wang, 2019: 28). In this regard, the relevance of the study is determined by the need to systematically analyze the concept of Chinese soft power in the context of its influence on international relations and the country's perception on the global stage.

To answer the question of how China uses soft power to advance its interests in an ever-changing geopolitical arena, the following sections will be examined:

- examine the theoretical foundations of the concept of soft power and its interpretation in Chinese political culture;
- analyze the main instruments of soft power, including the Belt and Road Initiative and the activities of Confucius Institutes;
- assess China's achievements and challenges in using soft power.

This study is based on an interdisciplinary approach that combines methods from political science, cultural studies, and international relations. Primary sources, including scholarly articles, monographs, and media studies, are analyzed (Smith, 2020: 63; Zhang, 2021:19).

### **Research materials and methods**

The main research materials include scientific publications by foreign authors devoted to soft power and its use in China (for example, Nai, 2004:7; Zhao, 2015:45), reports and analytical materials of international organizations covering the diplomatic and cultural aspects of Chinese policy (UNESCO Report, 2021:34).

An analysis of official strategies, cultural programs, and media publications identified the main directions of Chinese soft power and their connection with political culture (Wang, 2019:14). An analysis of publications in leading Chinese and international media outlets helped to identify the characteristics of public diplomacy and the perception of Chinese soft power abroad (Smith, 2020: 49). China's soft power model is used to compare it with similar strategies of other countries, such as the United States and Japan. This helped to identify the unique features of the Chinese approach (Zhang, 2021: 19). Examples for the analysis included projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the activities of Confucius Institutes, and China's digital diplomacy campaigns (Zhao, 2015: 50). All data collected as part of the study were critically analyzed, taking into account their source, context, and relevance. Particular attention was paid to checking the authenticity of the materials, which ensured the objectivity of the conclusions drawn.

To achieve the goal and solve the tasks of this study, a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach was used, combining the methods of political science, cultural studies, and international relations. This approach allows us to consider the concept of soft power in Chinese political culture not only from the perspective of its theoretical foundations, but also through the prism of its practical implementation.

### **Discussion**

The concept of "hard power" (hand power), which emerged at the end of the 20th century, is associated by many scholars with the military and economic power of states. This concept defines the power that implements the national interests and strategies of a state, ensuring its influence on the international stage. The implementation of the concept of "hand power" is based on the active use of military force, resistance and deterrence, as well as the provision of material assistance to close allies.

Since the 80s of the 20th century, a new understanding has begun to take shape in the theory of international relations, replacing the traditional principle of military force.

Its main concept was the concept of "soft power". This concept was quickly adopted by countries around the world. It was especially warmly received by the great powers that influence the world. The theory that emerged in the USA quickly gained support and became a tool of influential states (Kerimbayev, 2021: 19).

The scientist who first proposed the term and theory of "soft power" was Joseph S. Nye, Jr., a professor at the Kennedy School of Public Administration at Harvard University. According to him, state power has the ability to achieve the desired, convenient result. And this ability depends on the presence of certain resources in the political regime for the exercise of power and the ability to use

them effectively. In many cases, to achieve the desired result, you can activate factors such as spiritual and material culture, social and political principles, and the quality of the domestic and foreign policy being pursued. If you can use such additional factors correctly, it will provide ample opportunities to create a positive image of the country and accumulate special resources. According to Nye, "soft power" is the ability to achieve your goals not by force, bribery, or coercion, but rather by your own attractiveness. That is, getting others to do what you want without brute force or economic pressure (Kerimbayev, 2021: 19).

Joseph Nye constantly expands his definition of "soft power". In his 2004 definition, he says: "the ability to achieve a desired result through attraction, not through coercion or payment" (Ny, 2004:7). The scientist emphasizes "attraction" differently. He expands this in his 2011 work "The Future of Power". There, Nye defines "soft power" as "the ability to persuade, persuade, and create positive attraction in order to achieve an effective result" (Ny, 2011:20). Thus, according to J. Nye's concept, a subject must be attractive to an object, it must be liked, and this situation, in turn, allows the subject to use the object's favor to his advantage. According to J. Nye, the soft power of the United States was a major reason for the defeat of the Soviet government in the Cold War. Because the Soviet political elite did not recognize the great influence of soft power mechanisms on foreign policy confrontation. Commercial advertising associated with the United States was one of the important elements of soft power. "Generation after generation, young people in European countries west and east of the Iron Curtain found new cultural alternatives for themselves. Even simple things like blue jeans, Coca-Cola, and certain brands of cigarettes became opportunities for young people to express their own "I"" (Nay, 2004:36). He also considers the mass media in general to be one of the most important tools of soft power. He also emphasizes the influence of science on soft power. Nye's concept also includes propaganda. Nye believes that "mind-twisting is no better than arm-twisting" (Nay, 2011:20). According to Nye, the main sources of "soft power" include culture, political values, and foreign policy. However, Nye attaches special importance to the function of language. He identifies three main components of "soft power". These are: foreign policy, foreign economic activity and propaganda that increases the attractiveness of culture and language (Syroezhkin, 2011: 4).

Thanks to the joint participation of world scientists, the concepts that include the content of "soft power" and its definition have been established. Also, common mechanisms for the functioning of "soft power" have been put into practice. For example, humanitarian cooperation, investment, high-level dialogue and other types of "soft power" are especially actively used.

A definition that is close to Nye's concept of "soft power" is given by Russian scientists N.V. Kukhareno and S.V. Kukhareno. According to them, "soft power is a set of non-military diplomatic actions directed at other countries in order to form an attractive image of one's country and expand its sphere of influence" (Kukhareno, Kukhareno, 2013: 165).

Russian researcher D.V. Masyakov developed his own theory of the concept of "soft power". According to him, "it is an attribute of expansionist policy, which is more attractive and effective if it is based on the adoption and dissemination of common values, cultural and moral ideas". D.V. Masyakov considers "soft power" as a specially designed, aggressive strategy of a state to pursue its interests in a certain region (Masyakov, 2010: 13).

Chinese scholars give a slightly different definition of "soft power". Chinese scholar Liu Zaishi believes that "soft power is the wisdom and strategy of a state in its development and ability to use "hard power"( Liu,2009). That is, he puts "soft power" alongside "hard power". Chinese scholar Liu Guofu believes that the source of "soft power" is "hard power," and that hard power is the beginning of everything, while soft power is its extended manifestation. He also believes that the world is held together by opposing forces, and that one force cannot exist without another (Liu, 2012: 18).

Yu Xintian, a researcher at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, explains that "soft power is the manifestation of the influence of national culture in international relations".

Although there are various definitions of the concept of “soft power,” they all converge on a common understanding. That is, a certain subject of international relations does not resort to violent actions, but rather focuses on achieving the intended goal. Therefore, there is a commonality in the definitions of “soft power.” However, there are different views on the mechanism of its application.

First, when power is usually divided into “hard” and “soft”, the concept of material and non-material is taken as a basis. Many researchers consider the concept of “soft power” to be spiritual, not material. Among them is the Chinese scientist Yu Xintian. He considers “soft power” to be non-material. For example, he attributes the economic factor to material, that is, “hard” power [Electronic resource] <http://www.aisixiang.com/data> [Date of access: 2.02.2025].

Many researchers, following the principles of J. Nye, put culture at the forefront as the main element and driving force of “soft power”. The views of Chinese scientists on Nye’s theory are divided: some say that “soft power” is based only on national culture and its values, while the second group believes that there are other sources of “soft power”. And B.S. Glaser and M.E. Murphy distinguish two periods of the formation of the Chinese concept of “soft power”.

1. The 90s of the 20th century are the period of dominance of the concept of “soft power” based on culture.

2. The 21st century is considered the period of formation of the concept of “soft power” with a Chinese characteristic of a political nature [Electronic resource] [http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090305\\_mcgiffert\\_chinesesoftpower](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090305_mcgiffert_chinesesoftpower) [Date of access: 25.12.2024].

However, most Chinese scholars consider the first concept to be correct. They consider culture to be the most fundamental aspect of “soft power” and a key tool for dominance in this area, international competition. The person who put this forward was Professor Wang Huning, director of the Policy Research Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPC. He emphasizes that the role of culture should be emphasized in the issue of state potential. However, the culture he refers to is somewhat different from the traditional understanding. He believes that culture includes many factors, such as political structure, national culture and its diversity, economic system, historical development process, ideology, scientific and technical (Wang, 1993: 93).

Scientists from St. Petersburg State University I.V. Radikov and Ya.V. Leksyutina also attach special importance to the economic factor of “soft power” and the advancement of the Chinese development model. They agree with J. Nye that economic sanctions and various forms of economic pressure belong to “hard power”, but they also emphasize that successful economic development has a great influence on other states, especially developing countries (Radikov, 2012: 21).

“Economic heyday” is also considered by the Russian Sinologist M.L. Titarenko as one of the sources of the PRC’s “soft power”. In his opinion, many developing countries want to use Beijing’s experience (Titarenko, 2015: 7).

Zhao Lei interprets the role of China’s economic power in the policy of “soft power” differently. In his opinion, the growth of China’s economic power has stimulated the revival of people’s confidence in their own strength and revived the system of traditional Chinese cultural values. Although the Chinese scholar prioritizes culture as the core of “soft power”, he also notes a number of weaknesses in this area. In particular, he focuses on the difference in cultural and political dialogue between China and the rest of the world. He believes that it is very difficult to create a common value base in culture, as in economic relations [Electronic resource] <http://dangjian.people.com.cn/n/2014/0527/c117092-25071822-2.html> [Date of access: 30.12.2024].

The analysis of the sources used revealed a wide range of views on the concept of soft power and its role in Chinese political culture. The theoretical foundations of soft power, formulated by Joseph Nye, have been the starting point for much modern research in this field. In his view, soft power is based on cultural appeal, political values, and a confident foreign policy (Ny, 2004: 7).

This concept has been widely used to analyze China's strategies, as highlighted in the works of scholars such as Zhao and Wang.

The main ideas about the transformation of soft power in China are related to its unique adaptation through the synthesis of traditional cultural values and modern tools. Zhao emphasizes that China's soft power strategy is based on the promotion of cultural heritage and Confucian values, which allows the country to maintain its uniqueness in the face of globalization (Zhao, 2015: 38). This aspect is in line with Wang's conclusions, who sees China's soft power as part of the broader Belt and Road Initiative (Wang, 2019: 14). He noted that cultural and educational programs, such as the activities of Confucius Institutes, not only help to strengthen China's position in the international arena, but also create a platform for interaction with other countries.

One of the important areas of research discussed in Smith and Zhang's works was the study of digital diplomacy. These authors note that social networks and online platforms are actively used to promote the cultural and political image of the People's Republic of China. However, Smith emphasizes the role of state news agencies and their influence in shaping international public opinion. Zhang, in turn, analyzes the challenges associated with the adoption of Chinese digital diplomacy, including issues of trust and transparency.

Despite the positive results, the research has some limitations. Zhao and Wang point out the difficulty of assessing the real impact of soft power, since its success often depends on the perception of other countries. Some Western scholars, such as Nye, emphasize that excessive soft power activity can lead to accusations of hidden political motives, which is confirmed by the analysis of mass media sources (Smith, 2020: 52).

Thus, the state's "soft power" has become a foreign policy method that implements its diplomatic strategy without the use of force in the context of modern trends. In this context, much attention is paid to cultural diplomacy, the main component of "soft power". The PRC's "soft power" diplomacy can be considered "culturally centered", that is, designed to expand Chinese culture and cultural achievements to the world.

Cultural diplomacy is a method of promoting the interests of the state through indirect interaction, that is, bypassing the traditional model of relations involving interstate ties. Over time, this can contribute to the development of relations between two countries and their rise to a higher level. However, the effect of cultural diplomacy is visible only as a result of long-term work. The idea of using cultural diplomacy to destroy public opinion in the short term is ineffective. Hasty and overly active actions create distrust of a particular country, and society does not accept its values (Kerimbayev, 2021: 22).

The interrelation of sources is clearly reflected in the common tendency to consider China's soft power as a multi-layered and dynamic tool of foreign policy. All researchers emphasize the importance of the cultural factor, but their approaches differ in detail. For example, Zhao focuses on traditional aspects, while Wang and Zhang study technological and educational innovations. This difference allows for a more complete and objective coverage of the topic. Thus, the discussion of sources confirms that China's soft power is an integral part of its political culture and foreign policy strategy. As the analysis shows, its effectiveness lies in the synergy of traditional and modern tools, which is especially emphasized in theoretical and empirical studies.

## **Results**

The use of Chinese language and culture as a "soft power" has been elevated to the level of state strategy and the "Strategy of a Strong Cultural State" was adopted. The decisions of the 6th Plenum of the 17th Central Committee of the CPC Central Committee held in 2012 were specifically mentioned in the "cultural policy" section. It emphasized the need to get rid of the one-sided focus on the economy. At the same time, this plenum considered strengthening the cultural "soft power" of the state and increasing the global influence of Chinese culture. Great attention was



paid not only to exporting Chinese products, but also to disseminating Chinese cultural values to the world, and to determining the place of Chinese culture.

Using the historical principle method, we analyzed the historical evolution of the spread of the Chinese language in China's relations with the Central Asian republics. Based on the principle of scientific objectivism, we analyzed the "soft power" policy of the PRC in various regions. Using a systematic approach, we comprehensively examined the impact of the PRC's foreign language policy on regions and the world. This methodology made it possible to identify the main components and tools of China's "soft power". It was determined that Confucius Institutes are a structural system that implements the PRC's cultural diplomacy. Using the method of comparative analysis, we determined how the PRC's "soft power" policy and cultural expansion are proceeding in different countries of the world and in Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and its results. We also examined the similarities and features of the structures that spread the language and culture of the PRC, and made scientific predictions about the prospects for the development of Confucius Institutes in the world. Using the problem-chronological method, we clarified the formation and development process of the PRC's foreign language policy. And the interdisciplinary method allowed us to consider the PRC's "soft power" policy in the most comprehensive and comprehensive way. The descriptive method helped to determine the nature and directions of the foreign language policy formed within the framework of the "soft power" policy and cultural diplomacy, and to study the work of Confucius Institutes. (Kerimbayev, 2021:35)

The conducted research revealed the main aspects of the concept of soft power in Chinese political culture, its main tools and features of its implementation in the international arena. The People's Republic of China has developed a unique interpretation of soft power, based on the combination of traditional values, such as Confucianism and the legacy of ancient Chinese philosophy, with modern influence strategies. Unlike the classical approach described by Joseph Nye (2004, p. 5), China emphasizes historical continuity and cultural uniqueness. This allows the country not only to advance its interests, but also to form a stable positive perception in the international arena (Zhao, 2015, p. 41).

Confucius Institutes, initiatives to popularize the Chinese language and culture abroad play an important role in strengthening cultural ties with developing countries (Wang, 2019: 25). Educational diplomacy: scholarship programs and partnerships with universities help to strengthen cooperation in the fields of science and education (Smith, 2020: 52). Active use of social media and information platforms to create a positive image of China. As Zhang (2021, 24) notes, digital technologies allow China to expand its influence among young audiences in different regions. Research data shows that the Belt and Road Initiative has become not only an economic, but also a cultural project aimed at strengthening international ties. As Zhao (2015, 48) and Wang (2019, p. 33) show, through the implementation of infrastructure projects, China is strengthening its political and cultural influence. The negative perception of some initiatives as tools for hidden political influence (Smith, 2020: 56), criticism from Western countries that limit China's ability to build trust in the international arena, and the problems of adapting Chinese cultural values to the perception of countries with different cultural traditions (Zhang, 2021: 27) create limitations and difficulties in the implementation of soft power. China's soft power strategy demonstrates a high level of consistency, manifested in the combination of cultural, educational, and digital tools. An important feature of the Chinese model is its comprehensive nature, combining domestic political stability with international cultural exchange (Zhao, 2015: 50).

Thus, the results of the study confirm that soft power is an important element of China's political culture and that its implementation contributes to the advancement of national interests and strengthening China's position on the world stage. However, further successful integration of this concept requires overcoming the challenges associated with international acceptance and adapting strategies to local conditions.

### Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of the concept of soft power in Chinese political culture, its unique features and its role in implementing the country's foreign policy strategy. Based on the analysis of theoretical and empirical data, the following conclusions were drawn:

- The Chinese interpretation of soft power differs from the Western model. It is based on a harmonious combination of traditional cultural values, such as Confucianism, and modern tools of influence, including digital diplomacy and educational programs. This integration allows China to maintain its cultural uniqueness, while increasing its attractiveness on the international stage.

- China's main soft power tools include the cultural, educational and digital spheres. Confucius Institutes, international scholarship programs and media campaigns serve as important tools for strengthening the positive perception of China abroad.

- The Belt and Road Initiative has proven its effectiveness as a multifaceted soft power tool. It not only strengthens economic interaction, but also creates a platform for cultural exchange, thereby contributing to the expansion of China's political influence.

- The challenges and limitations of China's soft power include criticism from Western countries, the difficulty of adapting cultural values to the perception of other cultural contexts, and the need to increase the level of trust in the country's international initiatives.

Thus, the concept of soft power plays a key role in China's political culture, determining its uniqueness and effectiveness in the international arena. The established consistency and comprehensive nature of the Chinese soft power model allow us to speak about its potential to further strengthen the country's cultural and political influence. However, for the successful implementation of this strategy, it is necessary to take into account the global challenges associated with criticism and perception of soft power abroad. The prospects of current research are reflected in a more detailed analysis of the peculiarities of the perception of Chinese soft power in different regions of the world, as well as in the study of its interaction with similar concepts in other countries. This will allow for a more complete understanding of the dynamics of international relations in the context of increasing cultural globalization.

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<sup>1</sup>Алдабек Н.Ә. <sup>2</sup>Махмудова А.К.

<sup>1,2</sup>Әл-Фараби атындағы ҚазҰУ, Алматы, Қазақстан

E-mail: <sup>1</sup>[Aldabek.Nurzhamal@gmail.com](mailto:Aldabek.Nurzhamal@gmail.com), <sup>2</sup>[makhmudovaaziza01@gmail.com](mailto:makhmudovaaziza01@gmail.com)

## ЖҰМСАҚ КҮШ – ҚЫТАЙДЫҢ САЯСИ МӘДЕНИЕТІН ҚАЛЫПТАСТЫРУ ЖӘНЕ ІЛГЕРІЛЕТУ ҚҰРАЛЫ

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Қытайдың саяси мәдениеті контекстіндегі жұмсақ күш ұғымы мен оның маңызы қарастырылады. Қытайдың саяси стратегиясындағы жұмсақ күш концепциясын бейімдеу мен түрлендіруге, сондай-ақ оның халықаралық аренада ел мүддесін ілгерілетудегі рөліне басты назар аударылады. Елдің әстүрлі құндылықтары, «Бір белдеу – бір жол» бастамасы, Конфуций институттарының қызметі және цифрлық технологиялар сияқты заманауи құралдармен өзара әрекеттесуіне баса назар аударда отырып Қытайдың саяси мәдениетіндегі жұмсақ күшті қолдануды жан-жақты талдау зерттеудің жаңалығы болып есептеледі. Зерттеудің мақсаты – Қытайдың жұмсақ күшті пайдалану ерекшеліктерін анықтау және оның геосаяси үдерістер контекстіндегі тиімділігін бағалау. Жұмсақ күш концепциясының теориялық негіздерін және оның Қытай саяси мәдениетіндегі бейімделуін зерттеу; Қытайдың жұмсақ күшінің негізгі құралдарын талдау; халықаралық аренада жұмсақ күшті қолдану нәтижелерін бағалау; Қытай стратегиясында жұмсақ күшті қолданудың негізгі қиындықтары мен шектеулерін анықтау зерттеуіміздің негізгі міндеттері боп саналады. Зерттеу әдістері ресми құжаттарды, стратегияларды, БАҚ көздерін талдауды және зерттеушілердің жұмсақ күш концепциясына арнаған еңбектерін салыстырмалы талдауды қамтиды. Зерттеу нәтижелері Қытайдың халықаралық имиджін нығайту және ықпалын кеңейту үшін жұмсақ күшті белсенді түрде қолданатынын көрсетеді. Мақалада жұмсақ қуатты енгізудің сәтті мысалдары да, халықаралық қауымдастықтың оны қабылдауына байланысты қиындықтар да анықталған.

**Кілт сөздер:** жұмсақ күш, Қытай саяси мәдениеті, халықаралық ықпал, «Бір белдеу – бір жол» бастамасы, Конфуций институттары, цифрлық дипломатия, геосаясат, мәдени саясат.



<sup>1</sup>Алдабек Н.Ә. <sup>2</sup>Махмудова А.К.

<sup>1,2</sup>Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан  
E-mail: <sup>1</sup>Aldabek.Nurzhamal@gmail.com, <sup>2</sup>makhmudovaaziza01@gmail.com

## МЯГКАЯ СИЛА КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ И ПРОДВИЖЕНИЯ ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КУЛЬТУРЫ КИТАЯ

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается концепция мягкой силы и ее значение в контексте китайской политической культуры. Основное внимание уделяется адаптации и трансформации концепции мягкой силы в политической стратегии Китая, а также ее роли в продвижении интересов страны на международной арене. Новизна исследования заключается в комплексном анализе использования мягкой силы в политической культуре Китая с упором на традиционные ценности страны, инициативу «Один пояс, один путь», деятельность Институтов Конфуция и ее взаимодействие с современными инструментами, такими как цифровые технологии. Целью исследования является выявление специфики использования Китаем мягкой силы и оценка ее эффективности в контексте геополитических процессов. Изучить теоретические основы концепции мягкой силы и ее адаптацию в китайской политической культуре; Анализ основных инструментов мягкой силы Китая; оценка результатов применения мягкой силы на международной арене; Главные цели нашего исследования — выявить основные проблемы и ограничения использования мягкой силы в стратегии Китая. Методы исследования включают анализ официальных документов, стратегий, источников СМИ, а также сравнительный анализ работ исследователей по концепции мягкой силы. Результаты исследования показывают, что Китай активно использует мягкую силу для укрепления своего международного имиджа и расширения влияния. В статье рассматриваются как успешные примеры реализации мягкой силы, так и проблемы, связанные с ее принятием международным сообществом.

**Ключевые слова:** мягкая сила, китайская политическая культура, международное влияние, инициатива «Один пояс, один путь», Институты Конфуция, цифровая дипломатия, геополитика, культурная политика.

Information about authors:

Aldabek Nurzhamal Abdirazakkyzy, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Makhmudova Aziza Kazbekovna, Master's student, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Almaty, Kazakhstan

Авторлар туралы мәлімет:

Алдабек Нұржамал Әбдіразаққызы, т.ғ.д., профессор, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ Ұлттық Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

Махмудова Азиза Казбековна, магистрант, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ Ұлттық Университеті, Алматы, Қазақстан

Информация об авторах:

Алдабек Нұржамал Әбдіразаққызы, д.и.н., профессор, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан

Махмудова Азиза Казбековна, магистрант, Казахский национальный университет имени аль-Фараби, Алматы, Казахстан