



Soft power of the Republic of Korea to the countries of Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

This article touches on the common feature of the soft power of the Republic of Korea in Central Asian countries today, ranging from economic ties to the K-Pop music genre.

Keywords:

Soft power", South Korea, Central Asian countries, diplomacy, culture, economy, KOICA, music, film, TV series, medicine, education, migrants.

In the 21st century, there is an increase in the importance of "soft" levers of influence on the global community. Many countries are trying to create their own model of "soft power". This article examines the soft power of South Korea on the Central Asian countries through diplomacy, culture, investment, economy, as well as various Korean international organizations that play an important role in relations between the countries. The study also discusses the introduction of Korean community through the dissemination of Korean culture.

The term "soft power" was introduced into scientific circulation by Joseph Nye, an American political scientist, professor at Harvard University. Its theoretical concept of "soft power" was received in 1990, when J. Nye

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Presuming the primacy of the market structure of the economic system, J. Nye reflects on the importance that non-state actors, primarily transnational corporations, have acquired. In these changing conditions, the role of information technology and communication is increasing, and the success

¹ MGIMO "International Communications" Magazine
<https://intcom-mgimo.ru/2019/2019-10/soft-power-in-int-political-communication>

of the state depends not only on military or economic power, but also on the ability to be attractive, ensuring that "others want what you want."

The development of technology, the "post-industrialization" of society largely negate the importance of traditional methods of political communication, which in their entirety are integrated into the concept of "hard power". Under the "hard power" of J. Nye implies the use of such powerful means in foreign policy, such as, for example, military intervention and economic pressure. "Hard power" is the ability to compel, due to the material power of the country. Continuing his thought, the author wrote that the United States needs to turn to a new form of force that would allow the state to change the situation in such a way that other countries develop preferences or define their interests so that they are consistent with its own interests. Building his concept based on the above, J. Nye gives the following interpretation of "soft power": "the ability to attract others to one's side, seeking support for one's own agenda in international relations by demonstrating cultural and moral values, the attractiveness of the political course and the effectiveness of the country's political institutions."

In foreign policy, "soft power" is used by a number of countries such as the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Turkey, the United Kingdom and other states, respectively. We are interested in the influence of "soft power" on the countries of Central Asia, so we will focus only on a specific state from the above, namely in South Korea, which manifests itself most in this region.

Establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and the countries of Central Asia. The Republic of Korea was one of the first States in the Asia-Pacific region to recognize the independence of all the republics of Central Asia and established diplomatic relations in 1992:

1. Uzbekistan: On December 30, 1991, the Republic of Korea recognized the sovereignty of Uzbekistan. The Republic of Korea opened an embassy in Uzbekistan in December 1993. But even earlier, immediately after the

establishment of relations, in order to intensify cooperation, an education center was opened in Tashkent in May 1992.²

2. Turkmenistan: Diplomatic relations between Turkmenistan and the Republic of Korea were established on February 7, 1992. In 2007, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Turkmenistan was opened. In 2013, the opening of the Embassy of Turkmenistan in South Korea took place.³

3. Tajikistan: Diplomatic relations between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Korea were established on April 27, 1992. The Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan in the Republic of Korea has been functioning since April 2015 and the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the Republic of Tajikistan has been functioning since June 2008.⁴

4. Kyrgyzstan: In January 1992, diplomatic relations were established between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Korea. In September 2007, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea started functioning in Bishkek. In June 2008, the Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the Republic of Korea was opened.⁵

5. Kazakhstan: Diplomatic relations between Kazakhstan and the Republic of Korea were established on January 8, 1992. In 1993, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea was opened in the Republic of Kazakhstan. In 1996 the embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Korea was opened.⁶

Over the past few decades, the Republic of Korea has transformed from a poor country into an economic center and a model of liberal democracy in the world. At the moment, South Korea is one of the most developed countries in

² Establishment of diplomatic relations <https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2022/01/29/uzbekistan-korea/>

³ Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Turkmenistan https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/tm-ru/wpge/m_9176/contents.do

⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan <https://www.mfa.tj/ru/main/view/34/otnosheniya-tadzhikistana-s-respublikoi-koreya>

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic <https://mfa.gov.kg/ru/menyu---inostrannoe/--uslugi/politicheskoe-sotrudnichestvo/oliticheskoe-sotrudnichestvo-5c221d6feb1f1>

⁶ Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Republic of Korea <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/mfa-seoul/activities/2130?lang=ru>

the world, is a member of the G20 club of countries.⁷ Being one of the most powerful countries in the world in economic terms, South Korea actively promotes its political and cultural interests not only in the Asia-Pacific region, but also in the world, in particular in Central Asia. South Korea is a leader in the production of high technologies, in the heavy and chemical industries, medical industry, education, etc. The Republic of Korea has always remained an attractive foreign policy direction for the Central Asian states. On the one hand, the principle of multi-vector nature and the status of neutrality in the foreign policy of the states of the region contribute to the diversification of partners for cooperation. On the other hand, the pragmatic interests of the Central Asian elites have always been more clearly manifested in relation to states that are not in the area of direct geopolitical influence or pressure. In this regard, the experience of cooperation between the Central Asian States and the Republic of Korea demonstrates an example of pragmatic and mutually beneficial cooperation. In general, it should be noted that the Republic of Korea is actively increasing economic cooperation with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and partly with Turkmenistan, and with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is limited to the sphere of cultural and humanitarian interaction. Tashkent and Astana are striving to intensify the participation of Korean companies and investments in their economy and expect to receive high technologies and innovative developments.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea has the KOICA agency, the Korean Agency for International Cooperation, which implements projects of gratuitous assistance to states. KOICA has been working in the republics of Central Asia since 1994 and supports programs in various areas. For example, during the period from 1995 to 2021, the Agency allocated 130 million US dollars for the implementation of 30 projects in Uzbekistan.⁸ More than 2 thousand internships

were also organized for Uzbek specialists in Korea. Kyrgyzstan supports the creation of biometric passports and the "My Village" project.

The New North Policy of the Republic of Korea and the Central Asian States. Interest in cooperation has always been openly expressed during official visits of top officials. Undoubtedly, expectations are constantly being adjusted taking into account global trends in world politics and regional changes, as well as changes in the domestic policy of States. On the one hand, the activation of the Eurasian initiatives of the PRC as a "Belt and Road", Russia to create a Greater Eurasia, the United States — a New Silk Road, Japan — Silk Road Diplomacy, etc. pushed Seoul to put forward its strategic vision through the Initiative of a new Northern policy.⁹

Former South Korean President Park Geun-hye proposed a "New Northern Policy" in October 2013, which has been more fully developed under current President Moon Jae-in since 2017. The initiative itself is an attempt to activate the policy towards the continental states of Eurasia, including the Central Asian countries in the foreign policy of the Republic of Korea. The New Policy of the North, as well as the New Policy of the South, is part of the foreign policy platform of the Republic of Korea to create a "New Economic Map of the Korean Peninsula."

Cooperation Forum "Republic of Korea – Central Asia". The Forum is a diplomatic platform for discussing the progress of projects, as well as developing joint actions and initiatives at the level of Kazakhstan + 5 Central Asian states. As indicated on the official website of the Secretariat, the forums have been held since 2007.¹⁰

[perspektivy-uglubleniya-sotrudnichestva-s-korejskim-agentstvom-mezhdunarodnogo-sotrudnichestva-koica](https://www.koica.go.kr/eng/koica/perspektivy-uglubleniya-sotrudnichestva-s-korejskim-agentstvom-mezhdunarodnogo-sotrudnichestva-koica)

⁹ Presidential Committee on Northern Economic Cooperation

https://www.bukbang.go.kr/bukbang_en/vision_policy/strategy/

¹⁰ Secretariat of the Central Asia Republic of Korea Cooperation Forum

⁷ UN – South Korea <https://un-rok.org/about-un/about-rok/>

⁸ Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan [https://mift.uz/ru/news/obsuzhdeniy-](https://mift.uz/ru/news/obsuzhdeniy/)

In the real political process, relations are much more effectively built on a bilateral basis. Therefore, with the declared "Central Asian direction", there is an asymmetry of cooperation with five republics, where the most distinguished countries are Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Medium- and long-term goals in the Central Asia region:

1. Transport and logistics (creation of regional logistics transport centers and integrated terminals).
2. Energy – rational use and new energy sources (reduction of energy losses, new renewable energy sources).
3. Modernization and diversification of industry (management of special economic zones and privatization of state-owned enterprises).
4. Climate change – ecology (development of forestry to prevent desertification; creation of a complex of clean ecological raw materials).
5. Healthcare and medicine (creation of a network of medical institutions, exchange of doctors, improvement of infrastructure).
6. Education – culture (creation of a network of new generation managers, expansion of cultural and sports exchanges, e-learning system).

The soft power of the Republic of Korea.

The soft power of the Republic of Korea is more attractive and is perceived as not a threat to the local culture in the Central Asian states. The success of the Republic of Korea, its economic miracle, high technology and culture are admired by many in the Central Asian region. Sometimes the common belonging to the Altai language group is emphasized, which also brings the peoples closer together.

The effectiveness of the South Korean "soft" foreign policy model is increasingly felt in Central Asia, in particular in Uzbekistan. Restaurants of Korean cuisine, shops with Korean goods, clothing and cosmetics, as well as household appliances and electronics from the largest Korean manufacturers are opening everywhere. The number of people seeking to

learn Korean or visit the "Land of Morning Freshness" is growing rapidly.

Korean music. K-pop is a musical genre originally from South Korea. Its worldwide expansion began with the release of the viral track Gangnam Style and a music video for it in the summer of 2012. After the release of Gangnam Style, Korean music became interested all over the world, including in the countries of Central Asia. It was K-pop that became the key to the spread of Korean culture all over the world. Together with TV series, video games, national cuisine and clothing, it makes up the so-called "Korean wave", which has been spreading around the world since the late 1990s.¹¹

In Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, K-pop is especially popular among the young population, where it has become the locomotive of interest in modern South Korean fashion and styles. The annual K-pop party in Tashkent gathers fans of Korean pop music from all over the Central Asian region. Attempts are being made to create various pop groups as boy bands to popularize K-pop in the region.

Popularization of Korean ideology through films and TV series. Dramas are Korean drama series, characterized by a short duration and holding the attention of the audience until the very end. TV shows and movies serve as an excellent tool for introducing Korean ideology not only to the younger generation but also to the adult population who often watch TV shows after work. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Korean TV series have been actively shown on TV channels in Central Asian countries and for more than 20 years a whole generation has grown up under Korean TV series. Due to the fact that the influence of the series significantly affects the audience, there was also a case when parents called their newborns the names of Korean characters. Moreover, the creation of films such as "Parasites", which won an Oscar in 2019, is the first film not in English, awarded high recognition in 4 nominations at once: "Best

<https://www.kf.or.kr/korcenRus/cm/cntnts/cntntsView2.do?mi=1924>

¹¹ Real time <https://realnoevremya.ru/articles/187192-v-chem-fenomen-k-pop-i-pochemu-on-zahvatyvaet-mir>

Film", "Best Director", "Best Original Film". Script", "Best International Feature Film". The name Koo Jun Pyo (or Gu Jun Pyo) is known to many. In Kyrgyzstan, they even made a film "How to marry Gu Jun Pyo" in 2011.

Korean language and culture centers operate in almost all capitals of Central Asia and are actively supported by the Embassies of the Republic of Korea. There are educational centers of the Republic of Korea in Bishkek and Tashkent; the Palace of Korean Culture and Art in Tashkent; the Kyrgyz-Korean Information Access Center (Bishkek); the Korean Cultural Center in Astana; the Tashkent City Korean Cultural Center in Tashkent, etc. The centers host various events dedicated to Korean culture and language, for example; The "Week of Korean Culture" in Uzbekistan on 24.09-5.10.2021,¹² as well as exhibitions, festivals, music competitions, literary evenings, celebrations of Korean holidays, open lectures by professors, theatrical performances, etc. Can be noted a wide range and richness of events on the part of these centers.

Medicine. Another component that attracts citizens of Central Asian countries is medical tourism. South Korea is one of the leading countries in the field of healthcare and attracts more and more attention of residents of Kazakhstan. In addition, the Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, are interested in developing contacts with the Republic of Korea in the field of healthcare. Within the framework of bilateral cooperation, the Kazakh-South Korean Medical Center "SmartHealth" was opened in Alma-Ata together with the partners of the Korean clinic "Kangnam Severance". A National Children's Medical Center was opened in Uzbekistan jointly with South Korea.¹³ This is a unique pediatric institution for Central Asia specializing in high-tech medical services. There is an opportunity to perform more than 1,500 unique surgical operations per year. More than 100 doctors and nurses of the

medical center have been trained in South Korea to work at the center.

Education. There are about ten Korean universities and colleges in Central Asian countries and branches of Korean universities are actively opening every year. For example, in 2019, the Uzbek-Korean International University in Fergana was opened with a total funding of 11.9 million US dollars, focused on training specialists in engineering and technical profile and humanities.¹⁴ In February 2021, Korean companies handed over 275 robots and 350 textbooks to preschool institutions in Uzbekistan for the development of robotics and programming skills in 6-year-olds.¹⁵

South Korea has also established itself as a country with a high level of education quality. Korea's higher education institutions are included in the ranking of the best universities in Asia.

In more than ten universities of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Korean language is taught, educational activities are conducted jointly with the Korean Education Center at the Embassy of the Republic of Korea. The national universities of the two countries have established close ties with South Korean partners within the framework of signed cooperation agreements. Bilateral and unilateral exchange programs are being implemented with universities in South Korea. A clear example is the joint educational activities of the University of Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies with the universities of South Korea, in particular with the universities of Hanyang and Sangmeng.¹⁶ Labor migrants. In addition, it is important to note that South Korea provides a quota for the employment of citizens from Uzbekistan. According to the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of Uzbekistan, on the basis of an agreement signed with South Korea, 3,200 people were sent to work from

¹² UZ DAILY information portal
<https://www.uzdaily.uz/ru/post/63809>

¹³ ГАЗЕТА.UZ information portal
<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/05/21/clinic/>

¹⁴ ГАЗЕТА.UZ information portal
<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2020/06/12/kiuf/>

¹⁵ ГАЗЕТА.UZ information portal
<https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2021/02/09/robots/>

¹⁶ Tashkent state university of oriental studies
<https://tsuos.uz/ru/>

Uzbekistan through the Free Employment Systems program in 2019.¹⁷

Conclusion. In conclusion, it should be noted that South Korea has managed to create in a short period of time a national model of "soft power" capable of competing with the "soft power" of such powers as Japan, the United States, Great Britain, Turkey and other countries of the world. The presence of companies in the country that create high-tech products, ranging from smartphones to huge ships, has raised the South Korean brand to unprecedented heights. By introducing modern technologies and innovations, Korea has managed not only to preserve the traditional flavor, culture and custom, but also to spread it around the world. Given the recent trends in the region, it is possible to predict the further activation of the Korean soft power model. Which has managed to justify itself as a relevant tool of the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. However, despite the successes achieved in the above-mentioned policy, the real prospect of intensive cooperation in other areas remains vague for several reasons: In general, it can be noted that this is due to the nature of Korea's trade relations with the region, which is dominated by the resource and raw material flow. Moreover, the absence of an absolute leader in Central Asia complicated the integration processes necessary for the transport and logistics corridor. Also, weak legal institutions that could guarantee the inviolability of Korean business. The above factors have a decisive influence on the interest of the Korean side already.

¹⁷ Podrobno.uz information portal

<https://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/yuzhnaya-koreya-uvlichila/>