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CULTURAL AND HUMANITARIAN COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AS AN INSTRUMENT OF GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION AMONG CHINA, RUSSIA, AND THE UNITED STATES

Abstract

This article examines cultural and humanitarian cooperation in Central Asia as a politically meaningful field of competition among China, Russia and the United States. The argument developed here is that cultural diplomacy in the region should not be read as a harmless extension of friendship, nor as a mechanism that automatically converts attraction into geopolitical loyalty. It works through concrete institutional channels: language policy, scholarships, university partnerships, expert forums, heritage projects, development narratives and public diplomacy. The study is based on a qualitative comparative analysis of academic literature, official statements and publicly available policy materials from 2013 to 2025.

The analysis identifies three partly overlapping models of influence. China links cultural cooperation to the Belt and Road logic of connectivity, modernization and people-to-people exchange. Russia relies on historical memory, Russian-language infrastructure and post-Soviet institutional continuity, although this model has become more contested after 2022. The United States frames its engagement through sovereignty, resilience, educational exchange, English-language competence and the C5+1 platform.

The article concludes that Central Asian states are not passive recipients of external rivalry. Their multi-vector diplomacy turns cultural and humanitarian cooperation into an arena of selective bargaining, where external soft-power projects are accepted, adapted or limited according to domestic priorities, social expectations and sovereignty concerns.

Keywords: Central Asia, cultural diplomacy, soft power, geopolitical competition, China; Russia, United States, multivectorism.

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ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯДАҒЫ МӘДЕНИ-ГУМАНИТАРЛЫҚ ЫНТЫМАҚТАСТЫҚ ҚЫТАЙ, РЕСЕЙ ЖӘНЕ АМЕРИКА ҚҰРАМА ШТАТТАРЫ АРАСЫНДАҒЫ ГЕОСАЯСИ БӘСЕКЕЛЕСТІКТІҢ ҚҰРАЛЫ РЕТІНДЕ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада Орталық Азиядағы мәдени-гуманитарлық ынтымақтастық Қытай, Ресей және Америка Құрама Штаттары арасындағы геосаяси бәсекелестіктің саяси мәні бар кеңістігі ретінде талданады. Зерттеудің негізгі тұжырымы бойынша, аймақтағы мәдени дипломатияны тек достық байланыс немесе ықпалдың автоматты түрде нәтиже беретін «жұмсақ күш» тегігі ретінде түсіндіру жеткіліксіз. Ол тіл саясаты, стипендиялық бағдарламалар, университетаралық серіктестік, сараптамалық форумдар, мәдени мұра жобалары, даму туралы нарративтер және қоғамдық дипломатия арқылы іске асатын нақты институционалдық үдеріс ретінде көрінеді. Әдіснамалық тұрғыдан зерттеу 2013-2025 жылдар аралығындағы академиялық әдебиеттерге, ресми мәлімдемелерге және ашық саясаттық материалдарға сүйенген сапалық салыстырмалы талдауға негізделді.

Нәтижелер үш модельді айқындайды: Қытай мәдени ынтымақтастықты «Бір белдеу, бір жол» бастамасының байланыстылық және модернизация логикасымен ұштастырады; Ресей тарихи жадыға, орыс тілді инфрақұрылымға және посткеңестік институционалдық сабақтас-тыққа сүйенеді; АҚШ егемендік, орнықтылық, білім алмасу, ағылшын тілінің кәсіби беделі және C5+1 платформасы арқылы әрекет етеді.

Қорытындыда Орталық Азия мемлекеттері сыртқы күштердің пассивті объектісі емес, көпвекторлы дипломатия арқылы сыртқы ықпал жобаларын тандап қабылдайтын, бейімдейтін немесе шектейтін дербес акторлар екені негізделеді.

Түйін сөздер: Орталық Азия, мәдени дипломатия, жұмсақ күш, геосаяси бәсекелестік, Қытай, Ресей, АҚШ, көпвекторлылық.

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КУЛЬТУРНО-ГУМАНИТАРНОЕ СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВО В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ КОНКУРЕНЦИИ КИТАЯ, РОССИИ И СОЕДИНЕННЫХ ШТАТОВ АМЕРИКИ

Аннотация

В статье рассматривается культурно-гуманитарное сотрудничество в Центральной Азии как политически значимое поле конкуренции между Китаем, Россией и Соединенными Штатами. Основной тезис исследования состоит в том, что культурную дипломатию в регионе нельзя сводить ни к нейтральному обмену дружескими жестами, ни к механическому проявлению «мягкой силы», автоматически создающему геополитическую лояльность. Она действует через конкретные институциональные каналы: языковую политику, стипендиальные программы, университетские партнерства, экспертные форумы, проекты культурного

наследия, нарративы развития и публичную дипломатию. Методологически работа основана на качественном сравнительном анализе академической литературы, официальных заявлений и открытых политико-институциональных материалов за 2013-2025 годы.

В результате выделены три частично пересекающиеся модели влияния: Китай связывает культурное сотрудничество с логикой связности и модернизации в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь»; Россия опирается на историческую память, русскоязычную инфраструктуру и постсоветскую институциональную преемственность; США используют риторику суверенитета, устойчивости, образовательных обменов, профессионального значения английского языка и платформу C5+1.

В заключении обосновывается, что государства Центральной Азии не являются пассивными объектами внешнего соперничества: многовекторная дипломатия позволяет им принимать, адаптировать или ограничивать внешние проекты влияния в соответствии с внутренними приоритетами и интересами суверенитета.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, культурная дипломатия, мягкая сила, геополитическая конкуренция, Китай, Россия, США, многовекторность.

Introduction

Central Asia is often described through the vocabulary of a renewed Great Game. The metaphor is attractive because it captures rivalry, geography and the presence of outside powers. Yet it is also misleading. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are not empty spaces into which external strategies are simply projected. Since independence, these states have built their own diplomatic routines, identity policies and development agendas. Their central dilemma has been practical rather than abstract: how to use external resources, markets, educational opportunities and security partnerships without allowing any one external actor to define the limits of sovereignty.

This dilemma makes cultural and humanitarian cooperation more important than it first appears. Unlike military cooperation or large infrastructure loans, cultural diplomacy usually enters the region through less dramatic channels: language programs, scholarships, university networks, cultural centers, expert roundtables, development projects, media cooperation and heritage initiatives. These instruments are not always visible in daily political debate, but they shape what may be called the soft infrastructure of influence. They affect which languages are associated with professional mobility, which universities educate future specialists, which historical memories circulate in public institutions, and which external partners are considered useful for modernization.

The topic has become more urgent in the context of accelerated geopolitical fragmentation in Eurasia. China's Belt and Road Initiative has made Central Asia one of the key corridors of continental connectivity. Russia's war against Ukraine has changed the regional perception of post-Soviet dependence and made sovereignty discourse more sensitive. The United States, after a period in which Afghanistan dominated its regional agenda, has renewed its diplomatic language through the C5+1 format, educational programs and resilience-oriented cooperation. As a result, cultural and humanitarian diplomacy is no longer a secondary decorative layer of foreign policy; it is part of the competition over legitimacy, access and long-term social influence.

The research problem addressed in this article is that studies of great-power competition in Central Asia often privilege energy, security, military cooperation and transport corridors. These dimensions remain essential, but they do not fully explain how external projects become socially credible or politically acceptable. Cultural diplomacy is the field in which geopolitical interests are translated into educational aspirations, language choices, symbolic memory and professional networks. The main research question is therefore formulated as follows: how do China, Russia and the United States use cultural and humanitarian cooperation to project influence in Central Asia, and how do Central Asian states mediate this influence through multi-vector policies?

The aim of the article is to conceptualize cultural and humanitarian cooperation as a strategic but negotiated instrument of geopolitical competition. The objectives are to clarify the theoretical

relationship between soft power, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy; to identify the principal instruments used by China, Russia and the United States; to compare their narratives and institutional channels; and to show why regional agency limits any automatic conversion of cultural cooperation into geopolitical alignment. The working hypothesis is that cultural-humanitarian cooperation becomes geopolitically significant when external narratives are connected to local institutional needs: education, language training, infrastructure, professional mobility, cultural recognition and social development. Its effects, however, are filtered through domestic politics and the multi-vector strategies of Central Asian governments.

Research methodology

The article uses a qualitative comparative methodology. It does not attempt to measure public opinion statistically or to calculate the exact volume of cultural influence. Instead, it identifies the narratives, institutional channels and strategic functions through which cultural-humanitarian cooperation becomes politically meaningful. This design is appropriate because the object of analysis is not a single program but a set of discursive and institutional practices distributed across several external actors and regional contexts. A purely quantitative approach could count scholarships, centers or events, but it would not explain how these instruments are framed and why they acquire geopolitical meaning.

The empirical material consists of three groups of open sources. The first group includes academic literature on soft power, public diplomacy, Central Asian geopolitics and multi-vector foreign policy. The second group includes official documents and policy statements, such as China's 2023 Belt and Road white paper [1], Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept [2], and C5+1 statements published by Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the United States Department of State [3], [4]. The third group includes analytical materials on educational exchange, Confucius Institutes, Russian-language promotion, cultural heritage cooperation and public diplomacy programs in Central Asia [4],[5],[6], [7,p.241]. All sources are publicly available; no confidential materials, personal data or interviews were used.

The period from 2013 to 2025 was selected for substantive reasons. In 2013, China publicly launched the Silk Road Economic Belt in Kazakhstan, marking a new phase in Beijing's regional strategy. The following decade also saw the institutional consolidation of C5+1, the greater visibility of China-Central Asia summits, the post-2022 transformation of Russia's image and the growing use of cultural, educational and heritage diplomacy. This time frame therefore captures a cycle in which cultural cooperation became increasingly linked to larger geopolitical projects.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the sources were grouped by actor: China, Russia and the United States. Second, each source was examined according to four indicators: legitimacy narrative, institutional channel, targeted audience and expected geopolitical effect. Third, the results were compared across actors in order to identify similarities, differences and zones of overlap. The coding was not designed to produce numerical scores. It was used as an interpretive audit trail that makes the comparison more transparent and reduces the risk of impressionistic generalization.

The main limitation of the study is its reliance on public documents and secondary literature. The article can analyze institutional narratives and strategic designs, but it does not claim to represent the full range of public perceptions across Central Asian societies. This limitation is partly addressed through triangulation: official texts are read together with academic studies and regional analytical materials. Future research could extend the argument through interviews with students, cultural administrators, diplomats and participants in educational exchange programs.

1-Table. Operationalization of cultural-humanitarian influence

Analytical dimension	Operational indicator	Typical source material	Analytical question
Legitimacy narrative	How the actor explains its presence in Central Asia	Summit statements, foreign-policy concepts, official speeches	Is influence framed as development, historical continuity, sovereignty support or modernization?
Institutional channel	Organizations and programs through which cooperation is delivered	Cultural centers, universities, exchange programs, C5+1, BRI platforms	Which institutions turn cultural cooperation into durable networks?
Target audience	Groups addressed by the policy instrument	Students, elites, experts, youth, cultural professionals, wider publics	Which social groups are expected to internalize the narrative?
Geopolitical effect	Strategic function of cultural-humanitarian cooperation	Educational mobility, language prestige, heritage cooperation, expert dialogue	Does the instrument produce attraction, dependence, trust, agenda-setting or bargaining capacity?

Source: Compiled by the author.

The operationalization presented in Table 1 serves as a conceptual framework that structures the comparative analysis and ensures analytical consistency across different external actors. The selected dimensions were derived from the literature on soft power, public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, which emphasizes that influence is rarely produced by a single instrument but emerges through the interaction of narratives, institutions, audiences and strategic outcomes. The dimension of legitimacy narrative makes it possible to identify how states justify their presence and activities in Central Asia and how they seek to construct a favorable image of their regional role. The institutional channel dimension focuses on the organizational mechanisms through which cultural-humanitarian cooperation is implemented and sustained over time. This allows the analysis to move beyond isolated events and examine the formation of long-term networks and platforms of interaction.

The target audience dimension is important because different actors address different social groups and therefore employ distinct strategies of influence. Educational exchanges, language programs, expert dialogues and cultural initiatives are often directed toward specific segments of society that are expected to become intermediaries of broader political and cultural narratives. Finally, the geopolitical effect dimension connects cultural-humanitarian activities with wider foreign-policy objectives. Rather than assuming that cultural cooperation is politically neutral, the analysis examines how such initiatives contribute to attraction, trust-building, agenda-setting and the strengthening of regional partnerships. Together, these four dimensions provide a systematic basis for comparing China, Russia and the United States, while preserving sensitivity to the particular historical and institutional contexts in which their cultural-humanitarian policies operate. This framework also increases the transparency and replicability of the research process by making explicit the criteria used in the comparative assessment.

Results

The comparative analysis reveals that China, Russia and the United States use cultural-humanitarian cooperation through different logics of influence. The instruments often look similar on the surface: scholarships, cultural centers, expert forums, public statements and exchange programs. Their political meaning, however, differs. China embeds culture in a broader narrative of connectivity and development. Russia connects cultural influence to historical memory and the Russian-language

space. The United States links its engagement to sovereignty, resilience and professional modernization. Central Asia therefore appears not as a single soft-power market, but as a plural arena in which several ideas of legitimacy compete.

China's model can be described as connectivity-based cultural diplomacy. Since the announcement of the Silk Road Economic Belt in Astana, Beijing has presented Central Asia as a key corridor in a wider Eurasian project. The 2023 Belt and Road white paper emphasizes policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds as mutually reinforcing dimensions [1]. In this framework, culture is not detached from roads, railways or investment. Language training, scholarships, university partnerships and media cooperation help make economic connectivity socially intelligible. Educational diplomacy supports the same logic by encouraging regional students to acquire Chinese-language competence and professional experience in Chinese institutions [4],[5].

The strength of China's strategy is its material credibility. Cultural cooperation is attached to visible projects, transport corridors, development promises and the language of modernization. This allows Beijing to appear not only as a distant civilizational actor but also as a provider of opportunity. Yet this advantage contains a limitation. The attractiveness of Chinese cultural diplomacy is constrained by concerns about economic asymmetry, debt exposure, labor practices, Xinjiang-related sensitivities and the fear that connectivity may reduce local autonomy. China's cultural appeal is therefore inseparable from debates over China's economic power.

Russia's model is based on historical-linguistic continuity. Unlike China, Russia does not need to build a cultural presence from the beginning. Russian remains an important language of education, media, professional communication and mobility in several Central Asian societies. Soviet institutional memory, family biographies, labor migration and common cultural consumption continue to produce everyday familiarity. Russia's 2023 Foreign Policy Concept emphasizes humanitarian cooperation, support for compatriots abroad and promotion of the Russian language and culture as parts of its international role [2]. Rosstrudnichestvo and other institutions operate within this broader humanitarian framework [6].

The main advantage of Russia's strategy is depth. Russian-language infrastructure has been accumulated across generations and remains embedded in schools, universities, media practices, bureaucratic routines and labor migration networks. This gives Moscow a cultural influence base that cannot be quickly reproduced by other external actors. The same depth, however, creates vulnerability. After 2022, Central Asian states have become more cautious about narratives that connect language, historical memory and political loyalty. Nation-building, language reform and diversified partnerships increasingly limit the automatic authority of post-Soviet references. Russia retains influence, but its cultural position has become more politically contested.

The United States follows a more selective model that may be called resilience-oriented public diplomacy. Washington does not possess China's geographic connectivity or Russia's inherited linguistic presence. Its instruments are therefore concentrated in specific fields: educational exchange, English-language prestige, development assistance, entrepreneurship programs, cultural heritage projects, civil-society cooperation and C5+1 diplomacy. The 2023 C5+1 Ministerial statement emphasized sovereignty, territorial integrity, economic security, energy, environmental cooperation and regional resilience [3]. In 2025, C5+1 countries also issued a statement of intent on cultural heritage cooperation, linking culture to heritage protection and the prevention of illicit trafficking in cultural property [4].

The U.S. model is influential where it is associated with professional mobility, university prestige, English-language competence, technological modernization and international recognition. Its weakness is continuity. American engagement in Central Asia has often fluctuated according to broader strategic priorities, especially Afghanistan, energy security and competition with Russia and China. As a result, U.S. cultural diplomacy is attractive for certain educational and professional groups, but it does not have the everyday social penetration of Russian-language infrastructure or the infrastructure-development coupling of China's Belt and Road diplomacy.

A further result is that all three models target future elites. Scholarships, language programs, expert forums and professional exchanges are not merely symbolic gestures. They are investments in networks of interpretation. A student educated in Russia, China or the United States does not automatically become politically aligned with that country. Nevertheless, educational experience shapes linguistic capital, professional contacts, institutional trust and familiarity with particular models of development. Cultural-humanitarian cooperation can therefore produce long-term geopolitical effects even when immediate political outcomes are not visible.

2-Table. Comparative models of cultural-humanitarian influence in Central Asia

Actor	Dominant narrative	Main instruments	Strengths	Constraints
China	Connectivity, development and civilizational dialogue	BRI people-to-people cooperation; scholarships; Confucius Institutes; university partnerships; media and expert forums	Strong linkage between culture, infrastructure and modernization narratives	Concerns about asymmetry, debt, labor practices, Xinjiang and local autonomy
Russia	Historical continuity, shared memory and Russian-language space	Russian-language education; media; cultural centers; CIS/EAEU networks; compatriot and humanitarian policy	Deep linguistic and institutional embeddedness inherited from the Soviet period	Post-2022 reputational pressure; sovereignty concerns; national language policies; generational change
United States	Sovereignty, resilience and professional modernization	C5+1; educational exchange; English-language programs; USAID projects; cultural heritage cooperation	Prestige of education, professional mobility, innovation and diversified diplomacy	Geographic distance; policy fluctuation; weaker everyday cultural penetration

Source: Compiled by the author.

Table 2 summarizes the comparative findings of the study and demonstrates that cultural-humanitarian cooperation in Central Asia is structured around distinct models of influence rather than a single regional pattern. Although China, Russia and the United States employ broadly similar instruments, including educational exchanges, cultural programs, language promotion and expert dialogue, these instruments are embedded in different strategic narratives and institutional contexts. China combines cultural engagement with economic connectivity and infrastructure development, thereby linking cultural attraction to tangible modernization opportunities. Russia relies on historically accumulated linguistic, educational and cultural ties that continue to shape everyday social interaction across the region. The United States, by contrast, emphasizes sovereignty, resilience and professional development, seeking influence primarily through educational prestige, innovation and institutional cooperation. The comparison also indicates that the effectiveness of each model depends not only on the availability of resources but also on its ability to address local expectations and regional sensitivities. At the same time, all three actors invest in long-term relationship building

through educational mobility, cultural exchange and the formation of professional networks. This suggests that cultural-humanitarian cooperation should be understood not merely as a supplementary component of foreign policy, but as an important mechanism through which geopolitical influence is legitimized, reproduced and adapted to changing regional conditions.

Discussion

The results support the central hypothesis: cultural-humanitarian cooperation becomes geopolitically significant when it links external narratives to local institutional needs. The effect, however, is not automatic. Central Asian governments and societies compare external offers, use them selectively and place them within their own hierarchy of priorities. This point helps avoid deterministic readings of soft power. A Confucius Institute, a Russian cultural center or a United States exchange program can create contacts and preferences, but its meaning depends on the domestic political and social context into which it enters.

The first implication concerns the relationship between soft and material power. In classical theory, soft power is distinguished from coercion and payment [8,p.191], [9,p.300]. Central Asia complicates this distinction. China's cultural diplomacy is persuasive partly because it is linked to infrastructure, trade and financing. Russia's cultural influence is durable because it is embedded in labor migration, education systems and media markets. United States public diplomacy is attractive because it is associated with global university prestige, English-language skills and professional opportunities. Culture in this context is not purely symbolic; it is tied to pathways of mobility, employment and institutional access.

The second implication concerns the politics of memory. Russia's position shows that historical familiarity can be both an asset and a liability. Shared Soviet experience, Russian-language competence and long-standing educational ties continue to support Russian influence. Yet the same historical frame may also generate anxieties about sovereignty, especially when language and memory are interpreted as instruments of political hierarchy. This explains why Central Asian states may maintain cooperation with Russia while simultaneously investing in national language policies, alternative partnerships and diversified historical narratives.

China's case reveals a different tension. For many years Beijing's regional presence was interpreted mainly through energy, trade and infrastructure. The Belt and Road Initiative broadened this image by integrating people-to-people bonds into the language of connectivity [1]. Yet China faces a paradox. Its economic scale gives credibility to the development narrative, while the same scale can produce suspicion. Cultural diplomacy can reduce social distance only when it is perceived as reciprocal and respectful of local agency. Otherwise, it risks being interpreted as the cultural accompaniment of economic dependence.

The United States offers another type of symbolic vocabulary. Through C5+1, educational exchange and cultural heritage cooperation, Washington emphasizes sovereignty, regional problem-solving, economic resilience and professional modernization [10],[11,p.428]. These themes are attractive for Central Asian governments seeking diversified external relations. Still, United States public diplomacy is limited when it lacks sustained institutional follow-through or when its regional agenda appears reactive to Russia and China rather than grounded in long-term Central Asian priorities.

The broader theoretical implication is that Central Asia should be understood as a region of soft-power bargaining. External actors compete to define what modernization, security, culture and partnership mean. Regional states convert this competition into diplomatic resources [12]. They can use China's infrastructure and scholarships, Russia's language and labor networks, and United States educational and professional programs without accepting the complete geopolitical worldview of any one actor. This is the cultural dimension of multi-vectorism.

For Kazakhstan, this logic is especially visible. Multi-vector diplomacy has served as a strategy for protecting sovereignty while maintaining constructive relations with several major powers

[13,p.986]. Cultural diplomacy fits the same pattern. Kazakhstan can cooperate with Russia in education and language, with China in development and connectivity, and with the United States in professional mobility and cultural heritage without presenting these choices as mutually exclusive. This does not remove dependency risks, but it creates room for negotiation and policy diversification.

From a policy perspective, Central Asian states can strengthen their position by making cultural-humanitarian cooperation more transparent and reciprocal. Scholarship agreements, cultural-center activities, heritage projects and expert exchanges should be evaluated not only by the number of participants but also by their contribution to local academic capacity, linguistic plurality and institutional autonomy. External partners, in turn, need to avoid paternalistic narratives that treat the region as a vacant field of influence. Sustainable cultural diplomacy is more likely to succeed when it recognizes local priorities: sovereignty, youth education, social stability, environmental resilience, development and cultural dignity.

An additional observation concerns the changing nature of influence in the digital era. Cultural-humanitarian cooperation is no longer limited to universities, cultural centers or official exchange programs. Digital platforms, online education, social media environments and transnational information networks increasingly shape perceptions of external actors[14]. This development is particularly relevant for younger generations in Central Asia, whose understanding of China, Russia and the United States is influenced not only by official diplomacy but also by digital communication and online cultural consumption. As a result, the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy depends not merely on the existence of institutional programs but also on the ability to communicate narratives through contemporary media environments. States that fail to adapt their cultural engagement to these changing conditions may find that traditional instruments become less effective over time.

Another important issue is the growing role of agency among Central Asian societies themselves. Earlier interpretations of regional geopolitics often portrayed Central Asian states as passive recipients of external influence. The findings of this study suggest a more complex reality. Governments, educational institutions, experts and civil-society actors actively evaluate foreign initiatives according to their own interests and development priorities[15,p.252]. Cultural-humanitarian cooperation is therefore better understood as a process of negotiation rather than one-directional influence. External actors propose narratives and opportunities, but local actors determine how these resources are interpreted, adapted and institutionalized within national contexts. This perspective highlights the importance of domestic capacity in shaping the outcomes of international cultural engagement.

The findings also contribute to wider debates on regional order in Eurasia. Rather than producing exclusive spheres of influence, cultural-humanitarian interaction in Central Asia increasingly generates overlapping networks of cooperation. Educational mobility, language acquisition, professional exchanges and cultural projects create multiple channels through which individuals and institutions engage with different international partners simultaneously. Such overlap reduces the likelihood that any single external actor can monopolize the symbolic space of the region [16]. Instead, influence becomes relational, competitive and continuously renegotiated. This condition reinforces the strategic relevance of multi-vector foreign policy and explains why cultural diplomacy has become an important component of contemporary regional politics.

Taken together, these observations indicate that cultural-humanitarian cooperation should not be viewed as a secondary or purely symbolic dimension of international relations. It functions as a mechanism through which legitimacy is constructed, partnerships are institutionalized and geopolitical preferences are gradually shaped. The significance of culture lies not only in its immediate effects but also in its capacity to influence long-term patterns of trust, communication and cooperation. In the Central Asian context, where multiple powers seek to expand their regional presence, cultural-humanitarian engagement has become one of the key arenas through which broader geopolitical competition is expressed and managed.

Conclusion

This article has examined cultural and humanitarian cooperation in Central Asia as a strategic field within broader geopolitical competition among China, Russia and the United States. The analysis has shown that the three actors use different but overlapping models of influence. China links culture to connectivity and development. Russia relies on historical memory and Russian-language infrastructure. The United States emphasizes sovereignty, resilience, educational exchange and regional cooperation through C5+1.

The main conclusion is that cultural diplomacy in Central Asia does not operate as a simple instrument of attraction. It works through institutions, languages, educational mobility, heritage politics and expert networks. Its effectiveness depends on whether external narratives are compatible with local priorities and whether Central Asian states can preserve their own agency. The region is therefore not merely an object of great-power rivalry. It is a diplomatic space in which external influence is negotiated, adapted and sometimes constrained.

The scientific contribution of the article is the interpretation of cultural-humanitarian cooperation as a form of soft-power bargaining. This approach connects the study of public diplomacy with the literature on multi-vector foreign policy and regional agency. Future research may develop the argument through interviews, student mobility data, media analysis and country-specific case studies, especially Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where educational and cultural partnerships are becoming increasingly important for foreign-policy diversification.

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ТҮРКІСТАН САММИТІ: ТҮРКІ МЕМЛЕКЕТТЕРІ ҰЙЫМЫНЫҢ МӘДЕНИ ДИПЛОМАТИЯСЫ МЕН САЯСИ ЫҚПАЛЫ

Аңдатпа

Мақалада Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымының мәдени бірлікті саяси ықпалға айналдырудағы институционалдық рөлі 2026 жылғы Түркістан бейресми саммиті мысалында талданады.

Зерттеудің мақсаты – түркі халықтарының ортақ тарихи-мәдени коды, Түркістанның түркі әлемінің рухани астанасы ретіндегі символдық мәртебесі және жасанды интеллект пен цифрлық даму күн тәртібі арасындағы байланысты саяси ғылым тұрғысынан түсіндіру. Материалдар мен әдістер ретінде сапалық құжаттық талдау, салыстырмалы-институционалдық тәсіл және конструктивистік интерпретация қолданылды; негізгі корпуска Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымының ресми хабарламалары, Түркістан декларациясы, стратегиялық құжаттар және Қазақстан Республикасы Сыртқы істер министрлігінің материалдары енгізілді. Нәтижелер мәдени бірлік ТМҰ кеңістігінде тек символдық ресурс емес, күн тәртібін қалыптастыру, дипломатиялық үйлестіру, цифрлық жобаларды іске қосу және ортақ институционалдық тіл қалыптастыру құралына айналып келе жатқанын көрсетеді. Талқылау барысында ТМҰ-ны әскери-саяси блок ретінде емес, мәдени легитимацияға сүйенген көпсалалы аймақтық координация институты ретінде қарастыру қажеттігі негізделеді.

Қорытындыда Түркістан саммиті тарихи мұра мен технологиялық болашақты бір саяси дискурста тоғыстырып, ұйымның ықпал ету әлеуетін кеңейткен жаңа кезең ретінде бағаланады. Бұл тұжырым ұйымды қазіргі еуразиялық аймақтық саясаттағы жұмсақ ықпал тетігі ретінде түсіндіруге мүмкіндік береді.

Түйін сөздер: Түркі мемлекеттері ұйымы, Түркістан саммиті, мәдени бірлік, саяси ықпал, мәдени дипломатия, институционалдық интеграция, жасанды интеллект, цифрлық даму.