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THE PLACE OF SOFT POWER IN THE SYSTEM OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND ITS ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY.

Khudaykulov Sunnat Elmurodovich
Oriental University 2nd year graduate in history.
Phone number: +99899 552 66 83.

Abstract. This article analyzes the theoretical foundations of the concept of "soft power," its role within the system of international relations, and the mechanisms for its application in the foreign policy of states. It examines Joseph Nye's concept—including its relationship to the approaches of realism and liberalism—and explores the effectiveness of tools such as public diplomacy and cultural and educational exchanges. The author argues that in the modern global order, "soft power" serves as a complement to "hard power" and constitutes an integral part of a "smart power" strategy. Furthermore, the article considers the potential for utilizing "soft power" within the context of Uzbekistan's foreign policy.
Keywords: soft power, hard power, smart power, public diplomacy, foreign policy, international relations, cultural diplomacy.

Introduction. In the 21st century, the system of international relations is undergoing profound changes. The tradition of measuring state power solely by military potential and economic scale is giving way to a more complex approach: the ability to influence the behavior of other actors—not through coercion, but through attraction and credibility—has also become of significant importance. In the context of globalization, the information revolution, and the rise of transnational actors, this capacity has become firmly established in academic discourse under the term "soft power."

The relevance of this topic lies in the fact that, today, almost all leading and mid-tier powers actively employ "soft power" tools to shape their image, gain prestige within the international community, and achieve their foreign policy objectives with minimal expenditure. The purpose of this article is to elucidate the theoretical essence of soft power, as well as to define its place within the system of international relations and its role in foreign policy. The study utilizes systemic analysis, the comparative-historical method, and content analysis.

The term "soft power" was introduced into academic discourse by the American scholar Joseph Nye in his 1990 work *Bound to Lead*, and was later developed into a comprehensive concept in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004). According to Nye, power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to achieve desired outcomes—a goal attained through three primary means: coercion, inducement, and attraction. It is this third approach—where others come to admire your values and, consequently, choose to follow your path—that constitutes the essence of soft power.

According to J. Nye's theory, there are three primary sources of soft power: a culture that is attractive to others; political values that are consistently upheld both domestically and internationally; and a foreign policy that is perceived as possessing legitimacy and moral authority. Crucially, soft power is defined not by the "resources" themselves, but by how

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they are perceived by others: the very same cultural product might appear attractive to one audience, while seeming alien or threatening to another.

The theoretical roots of "soft power" can be traced back to classical works. E. Carr categorized power into military, economic, and "power over opinion." A. Gramsci's concept of hegemony demonstrated that rule is maintained not only through coercion but also through consent. S. Lukes proposed a third dimension of power: the ability to shape the desires and preferences of others. Meanwhile, the theory of interdependence, developed by R. Keohane and J. Nye, argued that in an interconnected world, the significance of military power diminishes, while non-military forms of influence gain greater importance.

The concept has not been without its critics. Realists argue that the measurement and outcomes of "soft power" are ambiguous, and that it is often rooted in economic and military might. Some researchers characterize it not as "attractiveness," but rather as a conceptual muddle. Russian scholar M. Lebedeva points to the term's polysemy—its multiple meanings—and the difficulty of operationalizing it. Nevertheless, Kroenig and his co-authors have demonstrated that soft power warrants serious study and that its influence in international politics can be empirically examined.

Soft power resources are quite extensive, encompassing culture and language, the education system, scientific potential, mass media, sports, tourism, the model of economic development, active participation in international organizations, development aid, and diaspora networks. For these resources to be translated into state policy, they must be channeled through public diplomacy. J. Melissen interpreted "new public diplomacy" not as a one-way communication from a government to a foreign audience, but as a two-way dialogue between societies.

In practice, each country has developed its own unique model. For the United States, this involves leading universities, the Fulbright Program, and popular culture; for France, the Francophonie and the Alliance Française network; for Germany, the Goethe-Institut and DAAD scholarships; for Japan, the "Cool Japan" brand; and for South Korea, the "Hallyu" (Korean Wave). China has been expanding its humanitarian and cultural influence through Confucius Institutes and the "Belt and Road" initiative, while Turkey has been doing so through TIKA and the Yunus Emre Institutes.

The effectiveness of soft power depends, first and foremost, on credibility. If there is a discrepancy between official statements and practical actions, its appeal quickly vanishes. For this reason, Joseph Nye has noted that a government cannot fully control soft power; a significant portion of it is generated by civil society, the business sector, and representatives of the cultural sphere.

In foreign policy, soft power serves several functions. First, it enables the shaping of the international agenda—that is, influencing the topics under discussion and how they are interpreted. Second, a positive image creates a favorable environment for cooperation and alliances, while also fostering trust in negotiations. Third, it enhances the legitimacy of a state's actions and reduces the need for military or economic pressure, thereby lowering the costs of foreign policy.

At the same time, soft power has its limitations: its impact manifests slowly, its results are difficult to measure, and it can be weakened by the counter-propaganda of other states. Often, conflating soft power with propaganda undermines its credibility. For this reason, the concept of "smart power"—which integrates both "hard" and "soft" tools—has gained

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prominence in contemporary research. Its essence lies in the judicious selection and combination of various instruments, depending on the specific situation.

There are also attempts to assess soft power. Rankings such as the “Soft Power 30” and the “Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index” compare the attractiveness of nations based on indicators related to government, culture, education, digital engagement, foreign relations, and the business environment. However, since such indices rely primarily on surveys and publicly available statistics, they cannot fully capture perceived attractiveness. From a constructivist perspective, soft power is shaped by states' perceptions of one another, shared norms, and identity; therefore, it cannot be explained solely through material indicators. At the regional level, factors such as cultural affinity, a common history, and a shared language create an additional foundation for cooperation, making soft power an especially valuable resource for small and medium-sized states.

Digital technologies have significantly transformed the practice of soft power. Social media, online educational platforms, and popular content enable states to establish direct contact with foreign audiences; however, they simultaneously increase competition and the risk of disinformation within the information space. Under these conditions, appeal is shaped not only by official promotion but also by the activities of non-state actors—such as universities, media outlets, cultural and sports organizations, charitable foundations, and the expert community. During times of global crisis, initiatives such as cooperation in the health and economic sectors, humanitarian aid, and science diplomacy strengthen a state’s reputation as a responsible international actor. Consequently, in modern foreign policy strategies, "soft power" is viewed not merely as a matter of image, but as a tool that influences tangible outcomes in areas such as negotiations, trade, security, and regional integration.

The importance of soft power in Uzbekistan’s foreign policy has grown significantly in recent years. Since 2016, the country has pursued an “open, pragmatic, and constructive” foreign policy, leading to the rapid development of cooperation with other Central Asian states. Uzbekistan’s soft power potential is rooted in the rich scientific and spiritual heritage of scholars such as Imam al-Bukhari, al-Termidhi, Beruni, and Ulugh Beg; it is further bolstered by pilgrimage and cultural tourism, the expansion of visa-free travel, international investment and cultural forums, and the establishment of branches of foreign higher education institutions. The hosting of the UN World Tourism Organization General Assembly in Samarkand and the establishment of the Center for Islamic Civilization in Tashkent serve to showcase this potential on a global scale. At the same time, strengthening information policy to bolster the "New Uzbekistan" brand, developing the export of education and science, and broadly engaging civil society institutions in public diplomacy remain key priorities.

Conclusion. In summary, the primary sources of soft power are culture, political values, and legitimate foreign policy; its effectiveness is determined by the alignment between words and practical actions—in other words, by credibility.

Soft power does not replace hard power; rather, it complements it. Its advantages lie in the ability to shape the international agenda, create a favorable environment for alliances and partnerships, enhance the legitimacy of foreign policy actions, and reduce costs. Its limitations, meanwhile, stem from the fact that results often emerge slowly, are difficult to measure, and are subject to limited government control. Therefore, the most effective

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approach is a strategy of "smart power," which integrates various tools in a manner appropriate to the specific situation.

From a theoretical point of view, the concept of soft power allows a broader interpretation of the problem of power in the science of international relations, taking into account the factors of values, perception and trust in the interaction of states. From a practical point of view, it opens the way for countries to strengthen their position in the international arena, expand the circle of partners, and create a stable positive image, even in the conditions of limited material resources. It is this aspect that makes soft power a strategically important tool for medium and small countries, including Central Asian countries.

For Uzbekistan, soft power represents a key dimension of foreign policy, rooted in its historical and cultural heritage, a policy of open dialogue, and economic reforms. To fully leverage this potential, the following measures are recommended: developing public and cultural diplomacy within the framework of a coordinated state program; expanding the export of services in the fields of education, science, and tourism; strengthening multilingual information resources aimed at international audiences; and establishing criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of soft power initiatives.

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