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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF US AND CHINA'S SOFT POWER STRATEGIES IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract:

The aim of this study is to explore the tools and perspective of the US and China's soft power strategies and to determine whether the US can exceed China in Uzbekistan. By applying a mixed combination of theoretical and empirical methods, this research helps to understand of soft power race in this pivotal region in a rapidly changing world.

Key words:

Soft power, hard power, Central Asia, new game, commerce liberalism, cooperative rivalry, debt-trap diplomacy, BRI, C5+1.

Introduction:

Central Asia has been intersection which different cultures, nations, religions and global trade roads were bound each other for centuries and these reasons made the region a vital geostrategic space. That is why this region attracted great powers since ancient times and they even competed each other to get control over the region using arms which was labeled as "the great game" in the 19th century. However, after the Soviet Union (as an heir of winner of that competition – Russian empire) was collapsed Central Asia has become a significant space of geopolitical rivalry between new great powers such as the United States, China, the EU as well as traditional actors again.

Uzbekistan, due to its geostrategic location, natural resources, exponential growth of population and reform-oriented trajectory of its policy, takes up a major role in this controversial arena. While China has expanded its influence through trade projects, investments, the Confucius Institutes to win in this "new game", the US proceeds to count on its "soft power" skills such as exchange programs, green card lottery, cultural diplomacy, USAID and media outreach in order to shape a positive image in citizens of Central Asia including Uzbekistan. This growing "soft power" race brings an important question up: can US soft power prevail over China in Uzbekistan?

Hypothesis:

US soft power has significantly pre-eminence in Uzbekistan in comparison to China.

Literature review:

Although there are a lot of studies and researches on China's initiatives and US soft power directions and challenges in Central Asia and Uzbekistan, few studies directly focus on the raised issue. Existing researches mainly focuses on Chinese economic advantage, cultural diplomacy and investment initiatives or US educational and science programs as a tool of soft power policy, leaving a conceptual and empirical gap regarding how these powers beat the other one to enter Uzbekistan into its own influence zone. Below some relevant literatures are listed which help to find an answer.

The article "The Dragon's Shadow: Chinese Soft Power in Central Asia" by R.Vanderhill, S.F.Joireman and R.Tulepbayeva analyses the issue why Chinese soft power remains weak and even causes significant public resistance in Central Asian region despite significant investments, particularly in the framework of project "The Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The authors investigate variations in the perception of China by regional elites and people, claiming that explanations based on merely on debt dependency are inadequate and argue that it mainly depends on historical land disputes between Central Asian countries and China, territorial claims and China's treatment to co-ethnic groups, especially Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs in Xinjiang (East Turkestan) province. However, the article concludes that Russia's invasion into

Ukraine in 2022 weakened its position in the region and it would create new geopolitical opportunities to expand China's influence, even though its success is contingent on the perception of China's soft power by regional countries.

The article "Instrumentalizing Islam: China, Russia, and US Soft Power Strategies" published in 2025 indicates how non-Muslim-majority great powers such as China, Russia and the United States are using Islam as a foreign policy instrument in their soft power strategies. The primary argument of this article is that each of them instrumentalizes Islam to shape a positive image on the international stage as a "Muslim-friendly country", portraying rival ones as malicious to Muslim people.

PhD student G.T.Zhumash and Doctor of historical sciences, professor M.A.Augan focused on US soft power policy in Central Asia from the angle of education and science in their article entitled "Education and science as part of US soft power policy in Central Asia". The authors argue how US is using scholarship programs, supporting universities and exchange programs in order to foster own political influence and shape a positive image in the region, including Uzbekistan. The article reviews "soft power" concept, historical samples of its application, and therefore geopolitical competition between the US and other big actors like China. As a conclusion, the authors note that notwithstanding the US created extensive set of education and increasing number of students from Central Asia, the US is facing a dynamic strife with other powers.

The article entitled "US Soft Power in Central Asia: Strategies and Challenges" which was written by Askar Terekbayev in December 2024 analyses key instruments of US soft power including educational programs, cultural diplomacy, promotion of democratic values, cooperation in the economic and energy spheres and the role of the USAID. The author explores main challenges facing US, especially geopolitical rivalry with Russia and China which are actively inviting their own initiatives and integration platforms to embrace region under their own influence. As a conclusion, A.Terekbayev notes that the effectiveness of American soft power policy is limited by the inner particularities of region and geopolitical competition between great powers.

"US public diplomacy towards the Central Asian countries" by E.F.Parubochaya (2024) analyses the goals, methods and tools of the US to promote its foreign policy interests in Central Asia. The author examines various programs such as support for civil society, non-profit organizations, media engagement and educational exchanges, as core instruments of its soft power. The research centers on the systematic approach of the USA indicating how it is fostering its influence in the region, including Uzbekistan, while other actors are also trying to get involve regional countries into their various programs. In the article it is claimed that public diplomacy is taken into account as crucial instrument for strengthening foreign policy potential in this region.

Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s book "Soft Power and Great-Power Competition: Shifting Sands in the Balance of Power Between the United States and China" published in 2023 provides the analysis of "soft power" concept and its role in the competition between great powers, particularly the United States and China. The author maintains that global challenges such as climate change and pandemics require both countries to cooperate ("power together") rather than just compete ("power over"). He recommends that the US should focus on "smart competition" which comprises maintaining reliable alliances, investing in domestic sources of strength and being open to cooperate with China in mutual interest fields.

The research conducted by M.Sattorova analyses the key directions of implementation of the US "soft power" in Central Asia since 1991. The author stresses initiatives carried out through US embassies, USAID and NGOs, are aimed at integrating region into the international community and preventing the emergence of xenophobic or anti-Western regimes. As a conclusion she claimed that US soft power remains arguable due to the contradiction of American interests and resistance of local authorities.

Theoretical framework:

Realism considers power and interest as a main category of politics. From a realistic perspective, soft power is considered as the extension of hard power resources (military, economic power and etc.). In Uzbekistan's case, China's growing economic

power – investments, loans and credits, large infrastructural projects strengthen its soft power and makes it attractive than the US for Uzbek elites.

Theoretically the concept is related to neoliberalism theory of international relations which emphasizes institutions, societal linkages, role of international organizations in relieving contradiction between countries. In addition to this, it is associated with "commerce liberalism" which defines economically developed countries can impact others offering beneficial cooperation and support. (Жумаш, Г. Т.; Ауган, М. А.;, 2024) From this angle soft power creates long-term partnership through institutional relations based on trust and interests. The United States as a traditional backbone of soft power takes an advantage over China in Uzbekistan through educational programs such as Fulbright, FLEX, supporting and promoting civil society by NGOs in this context.

Constructivism's main categories are identities, norms, symbols. So, from this view, the point is whether China and the US can create a good narrative to attract Uzbekistan. Both of them have supporters in Uzbekistan: Youth attract US cultural symbols, the elite are fond of Chinese economic pragmatism.

Analysis:

As Joseph Nye Jr. claimed that two fundamental shifts of global power in the 21st century: horizontal shift from West to East which can be called "Asian comeback" for its historical place and vertical shift from government to transnational non-government organizations due to information revolution and ecological globalization. These two tendencies required from governments to re-think their policy based on "hard power" and replace it with "soft power". And as a leaders of soft power strategy the US and China's relations, which can be characterized as "cooperative rivalry", are considered a pivotal point of these tendencies. (Nye, 2023)

Counting on the theoretical foundations discussed above, the following analysis examines the core elements of both countries' soft power in Uzbekistan based on comparative assessment.

China's soft power strategy:

China has strong relations with Uzbekistan since ancient times by means of The Silk Road. Blazing a trail China recognized independence and sovereignty of Uzbekistan on 27th December 1991 and diplomatic relations were established on 2nd January 1992. (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025) Since then bilateral cooperation has improved in a range of fields such as trade, culture, investment, logistics and made China a "first trade partner" of Uzbekistan. This helps China to implement its soft power policy in Uzbekistan. In order to understand Chinese soft power, it is inadequate to know only Joseph Nye's conception. Because Chinese government and scholars adapted his theory with its own public and cultural character. "Soft power" in China's context counts on the following three sources:

- Culture;
- Political power;
- Developmental model. (Vanderhill, Rachel; Joireman, Sandra F.; Tulepbayeva, Roza;, 2025)

China's Chairman Xi Jinping emphasizes the "Chinese soft power" based on traditional Chinese culture and Confucius teachings. This can be implemented through the sets of Confucius Institutes which teach other nations Chinese culture and language around the world including Uzbekistan. Besides it China sees "soft power" as a state project tightly linked its political power which means it is ready to mobilize all its resources to achieve its goal unlike Nye's conception which relies on civil society and culture. And China considers its developmental model based on state-controlled capitalism and its global "Belt and Road" initiative demonstrate it as "attractive power".

There are four directions to implement China's "soft power" strategy powered by above mentioned sources:

1) Confucius Institutes and student exchange programs;

There are two Confucius Institutes in Uzbekistan (China's Global Public Diplomacy, 2021). The first one was opened at Tashkent state university of Oriental

studies in Tashkent in 2005 and second one at Samarkand state university of foreign languages in 2013. During 2006-2024 more than 10 000 students learnt Chinese with the help of these institutes. (Ministry of higher education, science & innovation, 2024) Main functions of these institutes are to create Chinese language courses, to increase popularity of it abroad, to attract talented students to China, to share out Chinese culture and mentality around the world and to shape influence mechanisms based on above mentioned functions which is entirely appropriate to "soft power" concept.

According to the Ministry of Higher education, science and innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan more than 3 000 students studied based on Confucius Institute and Chinese government scholarships from 2005 till 2024. (Ministry of higher education, science & innovation, 2024) Education and science are fundamental basis of soft power, so exchange programs help China to mainstream its ideology to Uzbek students, to foster them as pro-Chinese and to influence Uzbekistan through them.

2) Public diplomacy;

China is so active to conduct big summits, events with Central Asian countries in the frame of SCO and beyond it. For instance, in May 2023 in Xi'an "Central Asia+China" summit was conducted for the first time and reached 54 major cooperation consensus and initiatives. Participants signed "Xi'an declaration" which says this summit will be conducted every two years. This kind of platforms are one of the main areas for China to influence to Uzbek elites attracting them with mutual interested initiatives.

3) Investments and debts;

China is considered as the largest source of investments in the region. Chinese economic activity in the region including Uzbekistan have been diversified from loans for infrastructure projects to foreign direct investments to build factories and modernize agriculture facilities. (Vanderhill, Rachel; Joireman, Sandra F.; Tulepbayeva, Roza;, 2025) Within 2000-2017 China invested into Uzbekistan's economy 6,5 billion US dollars for funding 149 projects. In 2024 FDI and credits from China reached to 7,2 billion US dollars and total volume was 18 billion US dollars

during 2017-2024 after Shavkat Mirziyoyev came to presidency. (Center for Economic Research and Reforms, 2025) It is expected that FDI will exceed 15 billion US dollars. (Kazinform International News Agency, 2025) When it comes to national debt it is 3,8 billion US dollars or 3,13 % of GDP of Uzbekistan, in other words 2 times bigger than 2019. (Thompson, 2025)

4) BRI as an attractive trap;

As a new Silk Road, the Belt and Road initiative (announced in 2013) is the most powerful soft power tool of China nowadays. This global project intends to invest in over 150 countries including Uzbekistan. China offers 5 routes which two of them pass through Uzbekistan to connect China with Europe. It means massive investment and loans come from China to Uzbekistan to fund constructing these 2 routes. China invested in Uzbekistan 3,08 billion US dollars for 15 projects within BRI alone in 2017. (Vanderhill, Rachel; Joireman, Sandra F.; Tulepbayeva, Roza;, 2025)

5) Islam as a religious strategy;

China like opponents instrumentalizes Islam as a resource of soft power strategy based on principle of non-interference and mutual economic benefits to support its BRI project and neutralize international critics regarding Uyghurs. Official Beijing uses Islam to shape a positive image in international arena presenting itself “friendly to Islam”. At the same time China applies “soft disempowerment” strategy against the US blaming it on hypocrisy in the context of Hamas-Israel war since 7th October 2023. However, this approach can be dangerous because goals of foreign strategies don’t match with domestic policy and it leads to accusation of China itself on hypocrisy. (Mamedov, Intigam; Jackson, Leonie B.;, 2025)

Despite of massive economic investments and initiative by China to Uzbekistan, its soft power remains weak and face the following three challenges:

First one is “debt trap diplomacy”. Increasing amount of debt year by year arouses anxiety in Uzbek people and scholars because of China’s usage from debt as an instrument against debtor countries. On the other hand, Uzbekistan’s new reforms

under Shavkat Mirziyoyev are depend on foreign investments and loans, especially from China. That's why dilemma is emerging between Uzbek elite and people.

Although there are not any common borders between Uzbekistan and China, Uzbekistan has concerns about land acquisition and debts to China. Survey conducted by Central Asia Barometer below indicates comparative qualitative data of the percentage of respondents concerned about debt and land purchases in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan between 2020 and 2022 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents concerned or very concerned about Chinese debt and land purchases, 2020–22

Country		*2020A*	*2020B*	*2021A*	*2021B*	*2022A*
Kazakhstan	Debt	69.9	69.0	68.5	70.2	70.8
	Land	89.4	94.1	90.1	90.0	91.2
Kyrgyzstan	Debt	77.4	87.7	87.4	86.9	84.5
	Land	86.2	92.1	93.7	92.3	92.4
Uzbekistan	Debt	38.6	40.1	43.0	38.2	34.0
	Land	64.6	64.9	67.3	64.9	54.3

Note: The Central Asia Barometer surveys typically include between 1,500 and 2,000 respondents per country per wave. These surveys are conducted biannually in the spring (A) and autumn (B). (Central Asia Barometer Data, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, Waves 7-II, 2020-2022)

As indicated in the figure 1 since 2020 concerns about debt and land had steadily increased, but after second half of 2021 it started decreasing. Despite this decreasing, anyway it remains higher which can hinder to implementation of Chinese soft power in Uzbekistan.

Second one is Sinicization of Islam and treatment to Muslim minority, especially Uyghurs. Because Uyghurs are relative nation to Uzbeks. Uzbeks worry about them,

however, unlike Kyrgyz and Kazakh neighbors, Uzbeks don't protest regarding this problem because of legal aspects of Uzbekistan's law. And Uzbek elite also prefer to keep silence because of good relations with China.

Third one is public opinion about China. Central Asia Barometer indicates that rating of China's approval is lower than Russia. Positive treatment decreased from 2017 to 2021. In particular since 2018 anti-Chinese attitude has increased because of strengthening of China's economic influence and Chinese immigrants' presence in Uzbekistan. (Vanderhill, Rachel; Joireman, Sandra F.; Tulepbayeva, Roza;, 2025)

The US soft power policy in Uzbekistan:

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the United States established diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan on 19th February 1992 (EMBASSY OF UZBEKISTAN IN THE US, 2018) realizing the growing role of Uzbekistan in the region and started actively promoting "soft power" strategies in order to reinforce its influence and propagate democratic values. As a leader on this sphere US conducts multifaceted strategies including educational and cultural programs, investments and partnership in energy sector, public diplomacy based on American national interests without using military power.

US's soft power policy can be divided into 5 strategies based on its fields:

1) Educational programs and attracting talented students;

The US actively supports long-terms partnership in education with Uzbekistan. This strategy occupies central place among others performing based on Salzburg seminar after WWII and "Act on foreign support" in 1961. This strategy helps to shape loyal elites and influence groups in Uzbekistan. There are a lot of exchange and educational programs for students, scholars, specialists, women and adults such as Fulbright, FLEX, Global UGRAD and others indicated in table below.

№	Name	Description
1	Fulbright Program	Founded in 1946 and funds by US government. For Master's and PhD students and scholars
2	Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program	For specialists
3	Global UGRAD	For university students for academic internship
5	Work and Travel	For university students
6	FLEX	For school pupils who can study in American schools and live in families
7	High School Exchange Program	For 15-18-year school pupils
8	FLTA	For English teachers
9	TEA	For English teachers
10	International Writing Program	2-week program for writers in Iowa University
11	TechGirls	For girls in science and technology sphere
12	TechWomen	For women in science, technology, engineering and math sphere

In spite of largeness of exchange programs for students and specialists' number of students which are studying in the US remains lower. In 2024/2025 academic year 1219 Uzbek students study in the US, 11,9 % more than previous year. (Жумаш, Г. Т.; Ауган, М. А.;, 2024)

The US started to open backbone universities and their branches in Central Asia since 1990s, but due to political disagreement with I.Karimov's regime it established first such kind of university in Tashkent as a branch of Webster university in 2019. Then in July 2024 it was announced that American University of Technology powered by Arizona State University was opened in Tashkent. These universities are also the tool for promoting the US values.

The US promotes its soft power policy in scientific sphere. There are several initiatives implemented by the government and NGOs. The US funds joint research projects in ecology, healthcare, education and technology. In 2022 the US government allocated 25 million US dollars for region in the frame of initiative aimed for raising education rate and export potential. (Жумаш, Г. Т.; Ауган, М. А.;, 2024) Besides the

US actively supports scientific conferences and seminars in Central Asia for exchange of knowledge. The American Councils for Collaboration in Education and Language Study (ACCELS), which re-updated its activity in Uzbekistan in 2018, prepares specialists who promotes American ideas and education system. Meanwhile U.S. – Central Asian Education Fund works on reforming syllabus of universities.

2) Cultural diplomacy;

One of the most powerful instruments of the US soft power is cultural diplomacy. In this field the US takes first place in the world and other countries cannot advantage over it. Cultural initiatives of the US include exhibitions and festivals, artist exchanges, musical tours. American music, movies and literature play an important role in promoting American lifestyle and values. (A.Terekbaev) Among these aspects of cultural diplomacy Hollywood is considered as a main tool which has not been giving its place to other competitors since 1980s in Uzbekistan in spite of emerging new opponents such as Korean dramas, Japan animes or Turkish series attracting the youth. Besides it American cultural centers like Cultural Heritage Centre which offer English courses and introduce the US culture and tradition to visitors.

3) Public diplomacy;

Public diplomacy is defined as an activity of government, aimed to achieve foreign policy tasks by establishing long-term relations with foreign audience, informing about national values and influencing people such as politicians, businessmen, elite and media who shape public opinion. (Парубочая, 2024) This strategy realizes through Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and its main strategic document which defines the US policy in Central Asia is “The Regional Cooperation Strategy for Central Asia Development for 2020-2025”.

The primary organization which conducts US public diplomacy in Central Asia - USAID was dissolved in 2025 due to cutting of funds by President Donald Trump. However, the US has another instrument to implement its policy. First one is supporting civil society and NGOs. This direction is on top priority. The primary goal is to strengthen the role of public organizations and encourage dialogue between them

and government organizations in order to shape social-economic policy. There are 4 programs to achieve this goal:

- **Program to Support Civil Society in Central Asia (2019-2024)**

This program is realized by “Eurasia” Fund and its budget is 18 million US dollars. Aim of this program is to develop active civil society and inform new generation of leaders.

- **“Social innovations in Central Asia” Program**

This program is aimed for strengthening the role of civil society, institutional development of NGOs, shaping young leaders. In 2021 grants for institutional development was allocated and 74 NGOs from Central Asia participated. 21 experts came to special training. (Парубочая, 2024)

- **“Partnership for innovations” Project**

The aim of this project is to raise status and competency of civil society for appealing them in receiving political decision.

- **Support for alumnus**

Fund for supporting democracy allocates grants for alumnus of the US programs to support networking with American colleagues.

Second one is supporting mass-media. One of the main projects in this field is “Central Asian program Media CAMP” which was implemented from 1st October 2018 till 30th September 2023. Its budget was 15 million US dollars. Media CAMP has several directions such as funding contents, media literacy, professional development and legal support. Because of this program 1500 journalists from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan got training, 41 non-government information agency got consultations, 41 projects on social topics (gender violence, poverty, education and etc.) were realized. (Парубочая, 2024)

4) Economic power and energy sector cooperation;

As a powerful economic power, the US has its own economic levers to influence Uzbekistan. Both sides want to strengthen economic relations, investment flow and mutual trade. Central Asian Investment Partnership (CAIP) is an initiative created by

the US jointly with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan which can be a sample of this lever. According to this project the US is about to invest in at least 1 billion US dollars within 5 years in order to support private projects contributory increasing of economic relations and removal of COVID-19 consequences. (Сатторова, 2022)

Besides above-mentioned initiative "C5+1" format can also be economic mechanism supporting development of economic relations. This format was established in 2015 as a platform for dialogue between ministers of foreign affairs of Central Asian countries and the US. It focuses on trade, transport and energy, adaptation to climate change, fighting against transboundary threats, situation in Afghanistan and development of cultural and humanitarian relations. First summit of presidents was held in New York in 2023. It means increasing of significance of this format as a dialogue between countries. (Terekbayev, 2024) Second summit was conducted on 6th November 2025 in Washington D.C. and Uzbekistan signed several agreements in economy, agriculture, water-saving, IT, rare materials, energy sector fields. As Donald Trump claimed that Uzbekistan is about to invest in 100 billion US dollars within next decade.

In energy sector till now the US did not intend to implement enormous projects in Uzbekistan unlike Tengiz oil field in Kazakhstan or Trans-Caspian and Turkmenistan-Pakistan gas pipelines in Turkmenistan. However, the US started interesting in Uzbekistan after Donald Trump came to presidency and in energy sector signed agreement in the frame of "C5+1" summit in Washington D.C. According to this agreement by 2030 Uzbekistan with the help of the US is going to establish a next-generation energy systems with 18-20 gigawatts of renewable capacity, in other words more than half of all electricity will be generated from solar and wind sources. (President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2025)

5) Religious diplomacy.

Like China the US uses Islam as an instrument of soft policy for Uzbekistan. The US demonstrates fluctuative policy between secularization of Islam and promoting religious freedom. Its strategy changes from president to president. For instance,

George Bush Jr. started macrosecularitaziton of Islam after 9/11, meanwhile Trump tries to conduct microsecularization, to ban entering Muslims into the US meanwhile keeping good ties with Muslim countries. (Mamedov, Intigam; Jackson, Leonie B.;, 2025)

During I.Karimov's regime the US accused Uzbekistan of restricting religious freedom. That is why Uzbekistan was very sensitive in relations with the US. However, both sides are growing partnership closing their eyes to domestic religious problems now.

There are some challenges to implement the US policy in Uzbekistan. They are:

a) Ambiguity of interests. The US soft power in Uzbekistan can be characterized as very "ambiguous". It is relevant to changing nature of American interests from president to president and on account of it unwillingness of Uzbek elites to cooperate with the US. (Сатторова, 2022)

b) Weak impact on elite. In order to keep their regimes stable the elite relies on China and Russia more than the US because of its critics about human rights issues, democratic values and low freedom of speech rate in Uzbekistan.

c) Increasing geopolitical competition. Effectiveness of US policy may decrease due to strong resistance of other actors such as Russia, China, Turkey which requires more expenses.

d) Risks of political instability. Some experts say that American NGOs funding by the government and educational centers may destroy traditional social constructs and stimulate increasing of protests. (Жумаш, Г. Т.; Ауган, М. А.;, 2024)

E.Parubochaya recommends that the US should add some aspects such as systematic approach and effectiveness, deep understanding of inner social and political context in Uzbekistan, long-term strategy and strengthening potential of foreign policy into its soft power strategy to take advantage over rivals. (Парубочая, 2024)

Comparative analysis:

Separate analyses on the US and China's soft power policy towards Uzbekistan were conducted above. It indicates how each country's strategies can significantly

differ from other one according to its essence and mechanisms. In order to assess these differences exactly and determine in which directions who is dominant soft power instruments of two countries should be compared by some criteria. Below this comparison is presented in a table.

№	Direction	China's soft power	The US soft power
1	**Education and exchange programs**	Confucius Institutes, scholarships from Chinese universities	Fulbright, Global UGRAD, FLEX, ACCELS – high quality, global prestigious programs
2	**Cultural Diplomacy**	Chinese festivals, language courses	Hollywood, English language, pop culture, music tours, cultural exchanges
3	**Public Diplomacy**	Central Asia+China platform	Supporting civil society and NGOs, mass media, Program to Support Civil Society in Central Asia, "Social innovations in Central Asia" Program, Central Asian program Media CAMP
4	**Economic partnership, investments and debts**	Increasing investment and debt amount, first trade partner, big projects in infrastructure	"C5+1" format, energy sector, high economic partnership, but amount of investments is low
5	**BRI (Belt and Road) initiative**	Primary tool to win, creating economic dependency through railway, logistics, transport and energy projects	There is not alternative in the US against BRI, but "C5+1" can be useful if it is implemented in a regular base
6	**Religious diplomacy**	Sinicization of Islam, negative attitude to China because of Uyghurs	Microsecularization of Islam, supporting religious organizations, promoting religious freedom

As it is indicated in the table above, the US took advantage over China in Uzbekistan according to educational programs and cultural diplomacy because of its leadership in these fields and systematic approach to achieve its goal. In economic criteria China is dominant not only in Uzbekistan, but also in whole region. Besides

China is a main source of investments and debts to regional countries. However, these growing debts cause total concern in Uzbekistan which can be advantageous for the US in a long perspective. When it comes to public diplomacy, both sides are active, but their approaches differ. China conducts pragmatic and practical policy; the US relies on communication and civil society projects. As it is mentioned in the table, BRI initiative is the most powerful tool which helps to leave the US behind and attracts Uzbek elites a lot because of economic benefits. In religious sector as a democratic country and a preacher of freedom of speech the US instrumentalize Islam as an effective tool while China has inner problem with Muslim Uyghurs and negative opinions of Uzbek people against it.

Conclusion:

In Uzbekistan competition between the US and China through soft power strategies is a complex and multifaceted process. Each country has its own advantages. Above conducted analyses demonstrates that the US is advantageous over China in educational and exchange programs, cultural influence, global prestige of English language, religious and public diplomacy based on democratic values. These factors shape a positive image about the US in Uzbek society. In particular the youth are fond of American lifestyle, pop-music, American universities and religious freedom.

Whereas because of geographical proximity, enormous economic projects, investment flow, growing debts and BRI project China takes an advantage over the US. However, the growing debt amount which leads to debt-trap diplomacy, religious-ethic viewpoints of Uzbek people regarding Uyghur problem restrict China’s opportunity in Uzbekistan. Nevertheless, Uzbek political and business elites prefer China because of economic benefits and unconditional political partnership.

Basically, the US is preferable for the society, China is attractable for the elite. It means that although China is superior to the US in Uzbekistan because of current elite in a short-term perspective, the US soft power can defeat China with systematic approach towards Uzbek society in a long-term.

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