

# AINUR NOGAYEVA (SEPTEMBER 2020). SOFT POWER OF BIG POWERS IN CENTRAL ASIA (INSTRUMENTS, PROCESSES AND LIMITATIONS). ANKARA: ORION KITABEVI

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This book addresses the underexplored topic of soft power in Central Asia, with a focus on three of the main players in the region: Russia, China and the United States.

A first part analyzes the concept of «power» and «big power» on which the author focuses her demonstration in the rest of the book. After having reviewed the multiple definitions of these concepts and their theoreticians, Ainur Nogayeva discusses the legitimacy of the dominant role of the United States in keeping a stable and secure international system. The question is essential in the case of Central Asia where the popularity of China and especially Russia are much higher than that of the United States, which has been criticized

for its lack of concrete commitment in the region, especially after it withdrew its troops from Afghanistan.

The second part provides a critical overview of the concept of soft power and analyzes its multiple dimensions, including its cultural one and the promotion of academic exchanges which in the case of Central Asia, where the education system is in the grip of serious difficulties, has played a significant role in popularizing the influence of Moscow and Beijing.

The final and main part consists of a case study on Central Asia. After a presentation on Russia's soft power which remains the most influential foreign player in the region, the author focuses on China where the purported consensus on soft power's

significant role in its foreign policy has collided with how it should be constructed and implemented or, put differently, to what extent this originally Western concept could fit into Chinese culture and approach. As the influence of this country has grown steadily in Central Asia, Beijing has pursued a multidimensional approach, using cultural tools while at the same time promoting its political and economic model combining a «peaceful development road» with «socialism with Chinese characteristics». In so doing, the Chinese government has markedly reshaped the concept of soft power to accord with its single party rule, whose consubstantial authoritarianism, combined with China's increasing economic power, distorts the very essence of the concept through the fear China can inspire across borders, including in Central Asia.

A plethora of works have been devoted to the geopolitics of the region, including foreign states military and economic influence rivalries, reviving at least rhetorically Sir Halford MacKinder's theories about who controls the heart of Central Asia controls the world. Few books however have been devoted to the multiple dimensions of soft power and how Russia, China and the United States have implemented it in Central Asia. This work is therefore welcome by its clear presentation on the concept of power and its implementation in Central Asia. It is also endowed with a didactic quality, an indicative bibliography for each of the studied topic, and questions for further discussion in the end of each chapter. This book is therefore useful for an audience interested in digging into the concept of soft power and into this understudied dimension of geopolitical games in Central Asia.