**ANNOTATION**

of a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in

6D020200 – International Relations

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“Academic mobility as a soft power tool in the system of

international relations of the 21st century”

**Significance of the research.** Over the past decades, international relations are undergoing major transformation, necessitating the development of new methods and tools for understanding processes and events in the world. Globalization and deglobalization, multipolarity, regionalization, digitalization, the emergence of new actors in the world coordinate system have brought different methods of interaction, thereby replacing traditional power mechanisms. Soft power as an important component of foreign policy is one of the response to the modern threats in the system of international relations. Geopolitical factors of world development also influence educational policy, turning it into an instrument of soft power in the hands of rival international actors at the global, regional and national levels. At the present stage, the sphere of higher education is one of the key elements in the system of international relations that represents a form of modern diplomacy. An academic mobility in the context of soft power as a component of higher education makes it possible to practically implement soft influence. State policy of soft power implemented through academic mobility contributes to creating a favorable image in the international arena.

Kazakhstan encounters with the necessity to implement a number of tasks through the use of soft power tools. The system of higher education requires a review of the borders, forms and methods of its state regulation to protect national interests and increase the level of national security. The formation of the national model of education through the prism of development of the education export program, promotion of the language and the spread of national cultural values will correspond to national interests and the positioning of our country at the world level.

The relevance of this study lies in the fact that many concepts used in international relations need to be clarified and specified in the context of new realities of the modern world. A holistic analysis of the higher education capacity and academic mobility as a tool of soft power of the Republic of Kazakhstan is needed. The international cooperation policy in the sphere of higher education of Kazakhstan needs to be rethought and made to conform to conditions and realities of international relations of the 21st century.

**The object of the research** is the academic mobility as an instrument of soft power.

**The subject of the research** is the trends of higher education and academic mobility as resources and instruments of foreign political influence of the state.

**The purpose of the research** is to comprehensively study the academic mobility as a tool of soft power in the system of international relations and to develop recommendations for the use of academic mobility as the resource for the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.\

The aim of the research identified the following **objectives:**

* to systematize the general theoretical basis of the study of the concept “soft power” in the system of international relations, including the analysis of the category "power";
* to determine methodological approaches in the study of academic mobility in the system of international relations;
* reveal the essence and content of academic mobility as a tool of soft power;
* to analyze the structural components, conditions and possibilities of conducting world university rankings at the global level in the context of implementing soft power;
* to study the main trends in the Central Asian region (CA) in the field of development of academic mobility as a soft power tool;
* to analyze current problems, challenges and threats when implementing academic mobility in the field of international relations of the 21st century;
* to reveal political and legal aspects and problems of internationalization of higher education in Kazakhstan;
* to develop recommendations on the use of soft power capacity in the conditions of transformation of the world scientific and educational space.

**The research methods**.

Different methodological approaches were used in the thesis due to the interdisciplinary nature of the studied problem. The use of diachronic, multi-active, institutional and historical approaches made it possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis of academic mobility in the context of soft power over time, to reveal the dynamics of the conceptual development of soft power, the influence of political, economic and educational institutions on academic mobility and its interaction with other aspects of international relations, to determine the role of governmental and non-governmental organizations in supporting academic mobility. An important approach in the thesis is sociological research and survey, implemented on the Google Forms platform.

**Main statements to be defended:**

* The evolution of the formation of the concept “soft power” in the theory of international relations is an interesting and complex process. The emergence of this concept was influenced by: a) understanding of the importance of cultural, humanitarian, economic aspects in international relations; b) historical events showing alternative tools to influence others; c) challenges and threats of our time, requiring new approaches to solving global problems; d) experience in developing new ideas in the concept of “soft power”. At the present stage, “force” in the system of international relations goes beyond a traditional understanding of “the use of military methods”, and includes “the power of impressions”, “mutual force”, “sharp force”, “smart force”, based on cultural, intellectual and humanitarian features of countries' foreign policy;
* The integrated and interdisciplinary approach is required for undertaking a complete and in-depth study of academic mobility in the system of international relations. Examining academic mobility through the prism of international relation theories, such as neoliberalism, neorealism, structuralism, constructivism, the theory of interdependence and functionalism, etc. allows us to interpret it as the soft power of the state. Each of the abovementioned theories reveals different aspects of academic mobility as a soft power tool in the countries' foreign policy.
* The concept of academic mobility is closely related to such categories as global education, transnational education (cross-border education), educational tourism (academic tourism), education without borders, educational migration, educational diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, scientific diplomacy, knowledge diplomacy, which denote the institutional conditions for the academic mobility implementation in the international educational space.
* Academic mobility in the sphere of international relations is a complex multilevel process that includes social, cultural-humanitarian, economic, legal, political and international aspects. The structural-functional approach and the system of principles (cooperation, multiculturalism, diversity, national identity, normativity, anthropocentrism, tolerance, geopolitical superiority and others) form the basis for the study of academic mobility as an instrument of soft power.
* In the modern system of international relations, the world university rankings play a significant role in the formation of the soft power of states. Despite some bias and imperfection of the current methodological criteria for evaluating universities, world rankings are in demand and the results are used by states for strategic planning. Universities with high ratings contribute to the formation of a positive image in the system of international relations, encourage the flow of capital and intellectual resources. Conversely, low global rankings will lead to a decrease in credibility to the country, worsen the international reputation of the state, create a problem in attracting investment, talented youth and scientists to the country.
* International challenges and threats of the 21st century, as well as the geopolitical role of Central Asia, have actualized the need for a regional approach to the internationalization of education. The common history, cultural values, religion, common geopolitical and geostrategic goals, common language background, and etc. are the main factors in the development of the Unified Central Asian Space of Higher Education. The Unified Central Asian Space of Higher Education initiated by the Republic of Kazakhstan and supported by other countries in the region can act as a way to develop regional academic mobility and be an integral element of the national concept for the higher education development in the Central Asian countries.
* Academic mobility as a soft power tool in the foreign policy of our state is used to strengthen friendly relations with foreign countries, expand cultural ties between them, strengthen international cooperation, expand the scope of business contacts, improve the quality of knowledge and the level of human capital development, develop economy (tourism, service sector, etc.), create the influential scientific centers (strengthening the material and technical base), increase the image of the country and the region, the universities’ competitiveness, a high level of employment, including abroad. In modern conditions, the Republic of Kazakhstan, for the purposes of national security in the context of the internationalization of higher education, seeks to find an optimal balance between traditional domestic higher education and a modern, competitive, internationally adapted university model.

**The scientific novelty of the research.**

* a comprehensive analysis of the soft power theory was carried for the first time in domestic political science, through the prism of the implementation of academic mobility programs in higher education in the system of international relations, with an emphasis on the role of academic mobility as a soft power tool;
* methodology in the field of studying soft power, international higher education and academic mobility in the system of international relations was expanded by developing a structural-functional approach, also a multi-actor approach revealing the role of new actors of modern diplomacy, correlation method of data analysis was applied to obtain reliable results in the thesis research;
* it is shown that a modern university becomes an instrument of soft power in countries’ foreign policy, promotes national interests on the world stage, and forms the image of the country in the conditions of global competition;
* creation of the Unified Central Asian Space of Higher Education is proved to be a timely and long-term strategy. It has been revealed that the development of higher education in the region and the expansion of regional cooperation to bring together scientific, creative and intellectual potential of universities throughout Central Asia is presented as a new method of confronting external challenges and maintaining regional security;
* a number of problems and challenges have been identified when implementing academic mobility as a resource of the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan;
* it is substantiated that academic mobility is considered as a resource of foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The conducted qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis show the impact of academic mobility on the foreign policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

**Theoretical significance of the research.**

First of all, the theoretical significance is associated with expanding the understanding of soft power. The theoretical conclusions obtained can be used in further research. The developed research methodology is a theoretical tool that allows to build an appropriate concept that takes into account global trends in educational policy. Its theoretically formulated result is the recommendations for expanding the use of soft power tools in foreign policy.

**Practical significance of the research** is that the recommendations can be used in the process of developing and implementing foreign policy and soft power strategies. The results of the study can be useful for formulating recommendations and developing policies aimed at strengthening academic mobility as a soft power tool in the system of international relations. The theoretical generalizations presented in the thesis can be used in the educational process when teaching courses on international relations, for further study of soft power, international higher education, and academic mobility.

**Approbation of the thesis.**

The main findings and thesis conclusions are presented in 15 articles, including presentations at conferences and scientific publications, journals from the Scopus database, journals recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance of Education and Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan, as well as journals of the Higher Attestation Commission of the Russian Federation, Russian Science Citation Index (RSCI). Scientific reports and articles are the applicant’s personal and independent contribution, based on experimental data and the research result of the thesis.

**Structure and volume of the thesis.**

The thesis consists of introduction, three parts, conclusion, the list of used sources and literature. The thesis contains 2 tables, 10 diagrams and histograms, as well as 8 figures.

**Compliance with the priority areas of science:**

This research corresponds to Priority Direction - 4. Intellectual potential of the country, Specialized scientific direction -1.4 Social and political science research. Geopolitics and International Relations;