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CULTURAL SOFT POWER AND THE CIVILIZATIONAL STATE: THE USE OF CULTURAL HERITAGE IN CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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Abstract. This article examines how China employs cultural heritage in its foreign policy as a resource of “cultural soft power” within the framework of the “civilizational state” concept. The aim of the study is to reconstruct the mechanism through which heritage is converted from symbolic capital into a sustainable foreign policy effect and to identify the constraints of this mechanism in transnational arenas.

The study adopts a qualitative research design, combining content and discourse analysis of official public texts of the People's Republic of China (2013–2024) with an analysis of institutional materials related to the UNESCO World Heritage regime. The empirical focus is placed on the serial transnational property Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an–Tianshan Corridor (ID 1442), conceptualized as a nodal platform where civilizational rhetoric, connectivity projects, and international recognition procedures intersect.

The findings indicate that soft power–relevant outcomes are enabled primarily through the institutionalization of meanings: the translation of civilizational argumentation and the “Silk Road” narrative into the language of international legitimation (Outstanding Universal Value), expert procedures, management plans, and monitoring mechanisms, which stabilize interpretations and create an infrastructure for sustained cultural presence. It is argued that without procedural fixation, cultural attractiveness alone does not ensure a durable outcome.

The study identifies several constraints on heritage conversion, including competing interpretations of “shared history,” the risk of dominance by a single interpretive center, the politicization of formally “technical” decisions, and asymmetries in resources and “voice” among participants. These factors may undermine trust and provoke symbolic contestation.

The scholarly contribution of the article lies in integrating discursive, institutional, and regional levels of analysis and in proposing an explanatory logic of “discourse → institution → effect/constraints.” Its practical relevance is associated with policy recommendations for Central Asian countries (including

Kazakhstan) aimed at ensuring procedural equality, transparency of joint governance, and multi-perspective interpretation of heritage within transnational nominations.

Keywords: soft power, cultural soft power, civilizational state, heritage diplomacy, UNESCO, Silk Roads, China's foreign policy, Central Asia, transnational heritage

Introduction

In international relations, cultural resources have long ceased to function as a “neutral background” and increasingly operate as instruments of influence that enable the pursuit of foreign policy objectives without direct coercion. The concept of *soft power*, understood as the ability to shape others' preferences through the attractiveness of culture, values, and development models, has provided a theoretical framework for analyzing such instruments [1]. In the case of China, debates on soft power since the mid-2000s have focused on its sources and limitations: on the one hand, the scale of cultural policy and the “symbolic capital” of civilization; on the other, the dependence of outcomes on trust, context, and political interpretation [2].

Against this backdrop, growing attention has been paid to the idea of the *civilizational state* – a conception of the state as the bearer of a distinct civilizational integrity and historical mission that claims its own normative standing within the international order [3]. In Chinese foreign policy rhetoric, civilizational argumentation enables the “translation” of strategic objectives into the language of historical legitimacy and cultural continuity, thereby reducing perceived conflict and strengthening the symbolic foundations of international cooperation.

Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes the incorporation of heritage into foreign policy through the notion of *heritage diplomacy*, emphasizing that heritage can function both as a means of diplomacy (*heritage as diplomacy*) and as a component of diplomatic processes (*heritage in diplomacy*) [4]. Academic debates further refine the conceptual boundaries of heritage diplomacy and distinguish it from cultural diplomacy in the narrow sense – most notably in terms of the constellation of actors involved, regimes of legitimation, and the role of international organizations [5].

In the Chinese case, heritage diplomacy is particularly closely intertwined with the “Silk Road” connectivity frame: the historical narrative of the Silk Roads is mobilized as a positive story of exchanges and contacts that supports contemporary cooperation projects and the “branding of connectivity” [6]. At the same time, heritage operates as a resource of *cultural soft power* – not merely as a display of cultural attractiveness, but also as a channel for building trust and legitimacy through internationally recognized statuses and rules [7].

Central Asia constitutes a sensitive arena for testing this mechanism. Research points to the risk of *sinocentric* historicization of transnational properties, whereby a shared route and a “shared history” come to be interpreted predominantly through the perspective of a single center [8]. Additional tensions arise from competing interpretations and struggles over “centers of meaning” within international memory projects, including those conducted under UNESCO auspices [9].

The article’s empirical grounding relies on the transnational serial UNESCO World Heritage property *Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang’an – Tianshan Corridor* (ID 1442), which includes components located in China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan [10]. The relevance of this study for Kazakhstan stems from the fact that the “Silk Road” theme forms part of the country’s national cultural heritage policy and international positioning and is reflected in domestic academic publications [11].

The empirical base of the study comprises (a) official public texts and statements of the People’s Republic of China that articulate civilizational arguments and the value-laden language of a “dialogue of civilizations” (including the programmatic speech delivered at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 27 March 2014) [12], and (b) institutional materials of the World Heritage regime that codify procedural mechanisms of recognition and governance (criteria, the language of Outstanding Universal Value, and requirements for management planning and monitoring) [13]. This juxtaposition makes it possible to trace the transition from rhetoric to formalized rules of international legitimation and shared responsibility.

The research problem addressed in this article lies in the insufficiently specified mechanisms through which civilizational rhetoric is translated into institutional practices of heritage diplomacy. In much of the literature, China’s soft power is examined through discrete channels of cultural diplomacy, whereas heritage diplomacy requires a different explanatory logic – one centered on international regimes of recognition, serial nominations, and expert procedures in which symbolic meanings are fixed within institutions framed as “technical.”

Accordingly, the research question is formulated as follows: how does China employ cultural heritage as an instrument of *cultural soft power* in conjunction with the idea of the *civilizational state*, and what institutional and interpretive constraints emerge when this strategy is implemented in transnational arenas?

The study advances the hypothesis that the conversion of cultural heritage into a resource of *cultural soft power* is secured primarily through the institutionalization of cultural meanings – via international regimes of recognition and governance (notably UNESCO procedures) – rather than through cultural attractiveness alone. The effectiveness of such conversion is conditional and diminishes under conditions of asymmetries in resources and “voice”

among participants, where transnational projects entrench the dominance of an interpretive center and trigger competition among narratives.

The aim of the article is to elucidate how cultural heritage is used by China as a resource of *cultural soft power* in conjunction with the notion of the *civilizational state*, and to identify the mechanisms and constraints that manifest in the context of “Silk Road” projects and transnational heritage regimes.

The objectives of the study are to: (1) refine the theoretical frameworks of *soft power*, the *civilizational state*, and heritage diplomacy; (2) identify the key mechanisms through which heritage is incorporated into China’s foreign policy; and (3) describe typical risks and limits to effectiveness (competition of interpretations, politicization, and asymmetries in resources and participants’ “voice”).

The article’s scholarly contribution lies in integrating discursive (civilizational framing), institutional (regimes of heritage recognition and governance), and regional (Central Asia) levels of analysis, and in proposing an explanatory logic that differentiates the conditions under which heritage fosters trust and cooperation from those under which it generates symbolic contestation.

The next section presents the materials and methodology of the study, followed by the results, which include a table of conversion nodes and vulnerabilities of the mechanism, a case observation of the transnational UNESCO property, and a discussion of limitations. The conclusion synthesizes the theoretical and practical findings and outlines directions for future research.

Materials and Methods

The study adopts a qualitative research design that combines content and discourse analysis with a case-study logic. This approach is selected because the use of cultural heritage as a resource of *cultural soft power* manifests simultaneously (a) in official foreign policy meaning-making frameworks and (b) in institutional mechanisms that anchor these meanings within international procedures of recognition and governance.

The empirical corpus comprises two datasets: (1) official public texts and statements of the People’s Republic of China from 2013–2024 ($n = 26$), which articulate civilizational continuity, the “dialogue of civilizations,” and narratives of historical connectivity; and (2) institutional materials of UNESCO and the World Heritage Convention related to the transnational serial World Heritage property Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang’an – Tianshan Corridor (ID 1442), as well as to the procedural requirements of the regime ($n = 16$) [10; 13].

The analytical procedure involved three steps: (1) identifying recurrent meaning clusters in the official discourse (civilizational continuity; dialogue of civilizations; the “Silk Roads” as a connectivity frame); (2) aligning these clusters with institutional “nodes” of the heritage regime (the language of Outstanding Universal Value, expert evaluation, requirements for management

planning and monitoring); and (3) documenting constraints on conversion (competition of interpretations, the risk of dominance by a single interpretive center, politicization of formally “technical” procedures, and asymmetries in resources and participants’ “voice”).

Selection criteria and analytical procedures were standardized to enhance reproducibility. The official corpus included texts that (a) were published on official platforms and addressed to an international audience; (b) linked foreign policy positions to civilizational argumentation and/or a humanitarian agenda; and (c) fell within the 2013–2024 period, corresponding to the phase of active institutionalization of the “Silk Road” frame. The institutional corpus comprised World Heritage regime documents that define rules for recognition and governance (the language of Outstanding Universal Value, requirements for management systems/plans, monitoring, and periodic reporting) [13]. Coding was conducted using predefined categories (civilizational continuity; dialogue/mutual learning; connectivity/Silk Roads; legitimation procedures; governance mechanisms; constraints on conversion). To reduce subjectivity, analytical memos and repeated code checks on subsets of materials were employed; interpretive discrepancies were resolved through harmonization of formulations and reference back to source contexts, with a sample of texts re-coded after an interval and cross-checked against the codebook. To keep the manuscript within word limits, only representative sources are listed here. The official corpus includes, *inter alia*: (i) Xi Jinping, “Speech at UNESCO Headquarters” (Paris, 27 March 2014); (ii) Xi Jinping, “Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road” (Belt and Road Forum, 14 May 2017); and (iii) Xi Jinping, “Deepening Exchanges and Mutual Learning Among Civilizations...” (Conference on Dialogue of Asian Civilizations, 15 May 2019). The institutional corpus includes: (iv) UNESCO World Heritage Centre listing for Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang’an–Tianshan Corridor (ID 1442); (v) the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention; and (vi) the text of the World Heritage Convention. The full inventory (titles, dates, and URLs) and the coding scheme remain available upon request.

The operationalization of “conversion nodes” followed the correspondence principle of frame → procedure → effect/risk. For each discursive frame, the analysis documented (a) typical rhetorical markers and (b) institutional anchoring points within the heritage regime (e.g., translating historical connectivity into requirements for substantiating Outstanding Universal Value and for governance instruments). These correspondences were then consolidated into a matrix (conversion node, mechanism, effect, constraint), enabling a distinction between the symbolic level of attractiveness and the procedural level of international legitimation, and revealing where vulnerabilities in the conversion process arise.

Study Limitations. The study does not quantify public reception or measure “soft power effects”; its findings pertain to the level of foreign policy discourse and the institutionalization of heritage within international regimes. Because the analysis relies on public texts and documents of international organizations, aspects of negotiation dynamics and informal practices remain beyond observation.

Results

A comparison of the PRC’s official foreign policy discourse with materials from the international heritage regime indicates that cultural heritage is employed as an instrument of *cultural soft power* not only through symbolic attractiveness but, above all, through the institutionalization of meanings within procedures of recognition and governance. Within this mechanism, heritage performs three interrelated functions: (1) providing civilizational legitimation for foreign policy positioning; (2) supporting the narrative of historical connectivity (the “Silk Roads”) as a cultural framework for cooperation; and (3) building an infrastructure for sustained cultural presence through internationally recognized statuses, expertise, and governance standards.

1. Discursive level: three recurrent clusters. Official public texts reproduce three meaning constructions that enable a “soft” framing of foreign policy. The first is civilizational continuity, whereby China’s foreign policy role is explained through the longevity and cultural depth of its civilization. The second is the universalizing language of the “dialogue of civilizations,” which legitimizes cooperation as value-based and inclusive. The third is the “Silk Roads” as a meta-narrative of connectivity, in which the historical past of routes is mobilized to normalize contemporary connectivity and humanitarian contacts.

These clusters are marked by recurring rhetorical indicators. In the PRC corpus, the continuity cluster is recurrently signaled by formulations such as a 5,000-year-old Chinese civilization and civilizational rejuvenation; the dialogic-universalist cluster by dialogue among civilizations and mutual learning among civilizations; and the connectivity cluster by the Silk Road spirit and people-to-people connectivity. Repeated across documents, these micro-formulae function as a traceable discourse “tag” that can be followed into institutional language and procedural requirements, reducing reliance on purely interpretive paraphrase alone. Two clusters are particularly explicit in the PRC discourse. The value-laden language of “dialogue” and “mutual learning among civilizations” is presented as a universal principle of international cooperation and as a basis for legitimizing cultural presence on global platforms [12]. Within the “Silk Road” frame, emphasis is placed on historical connectivity, exchanges, and contacts, enabling contemporary initiatives to be portrayed as a continuation of long-standing interactions rather than as rupture or expansion [12]. As a result, cultural heritage becomes a convenient “entry point” into foreign policy: it translates strategic

projects into the language of culture and memory and lowers the threshold of perceived conflict.

2. *Institutionalization: how discourse becomes durable practice.* The conversion of heritage into a resource of *soft power* is strengthened where civilizational and “Silk Road” rhetoric is translated into the language of international legitimation and governance requirements (criteria, Outstanding Universal Value terminology, expert procedures, management planning, and monitoring) [13]. Two illustrative “translation moves” make this conversion empirically visible. First, the connectivity frame (“Silk Roads” as a story of exchanges and contacts) is operationalized in the OUV substantiation by foregrounding intercultural interchange along routes and by linking interpretive narratives to the property’s attributes, boundaries/buffer zones, and integrity/authenticity arguments; in the case of ID 1442, this logic is consistent with the inscription emphasis on interchange and route-based cultural landscapes (criteria (ii)(iii)(v)(vi)) [10]. Second, the dialogue/universalism frame is proceduralized through expert-language constraints: comparative analysis requirements, advisory body evaluations, and standardized criteria force value claims to be framed as “universal” and evidence-based, which simultaneously stabilizes meanings and increases sensitivity to questions of whose interpretation becomes the reference point in a transnational dossier [13]. Procedural fixation reduces interpretive arbitrariness while simultaneously increasing sensitivity to questions of who sets the meaning framework and how responsibility is allocated.

Schematically, the logic of conversion and its points of vulnerability are presented in Figure 1.

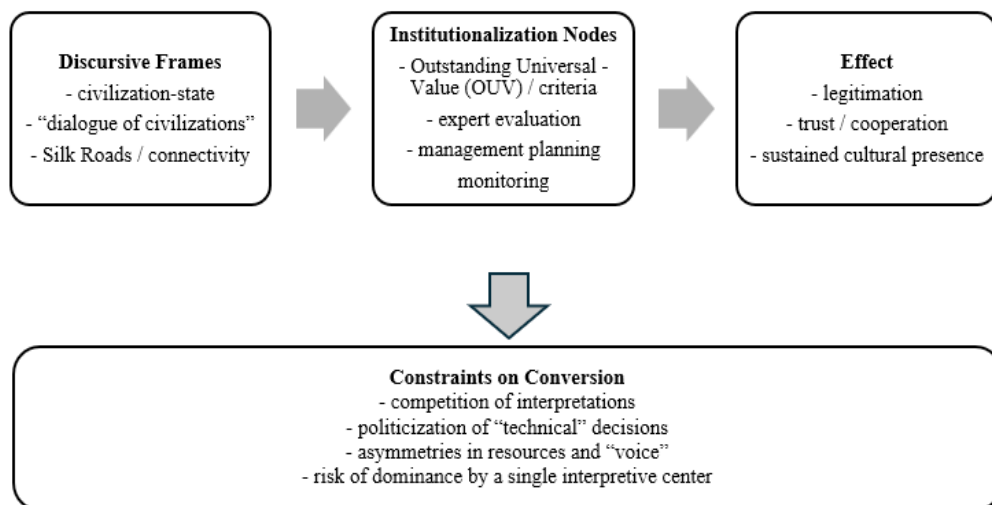


Figure 1. Conversion of Cultural Heritage into Cultural Soft Power: Discursive Frames, Institutional Nodes, and Constraints on Effectiveness

To keep the mechanism transparent and verifiable, the conversion logic is summarized directly in Table 1. It maps each discursive frame to its institutional anchoring points in the World Heritage regime and specifies the intended outcome alongside the key constraints/vulnerabilities.

Table 1 presents a structured overview of the main nodes through which cultural heritage is converted into cultural soft power, together with the institutional constraints that limit or condition this conversion.

Table 1. Key Nodes in the Conversion of Cultural Heritage into Cultural Soft Power and Associated Constraints

<i>Discursive frame</i>	<i>Institutional procedure (heritage regime)</i>	<i>Intended effect</i>	<i>Key constraint / vulnerability</i>
Civilization-state	Translation of civilizational narratives into OUV language; expert evaluation procedures	Civilizational legitimacy of foreign policy positioning	Dominance of a single interpretive center; marginalization of alternative historical perspectives
Dialogue of civilizations	Expert discourse, advisory body assessments, formalized evaluation criteria	Trust-building and symbolic inclusiveness	Competition of interpretations; selective universalism of value language
Silk Roads / connectivity	Serial nomination logic; management planning across components; transnational coordination	Normalization of contemporary connectivity through historical continuity	Asymmetry of resources and “voice” among participating states
Shared heritage / common history	Joint management requirements; monitoring and periodic reporting	Long-term cultural presence and institutionalized cooperation	Politicization of formally “technical” procedures; erosion of procedural trust

3. *Case Observation:* The Silk Roads (ID 1442) as a Site Linking the “Civilization-State” Framework and Soft Power. The transnational serial World Heritage property Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang’an–Tianshan Corridor represents a revealing institutional configuration in which a cultural narrative of connectivity is translated into a regime of shared governance. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre listing, the property was inscribed in 2014 under criteria (ii)(iii)(v)(vi), which makes the “connectivity-through-exchange” interpretation not merely a narrative claim but a formal evaluative baseline within the World Heritage regime [10]. The property’s status provides not only symbolic legitimation but also a set of formalized obligations, including the articulation of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), the coordination of conservation approaches, management planning, and

monitoring, all of which require continuous coordination among participating states [10; 13]. For this reason, the “Silk Roads” framework operates not as a one-off communicative gesture but as an infrastructure of sustained cultural presence: interpretations of the past are embedded in documents and procedures, and cooperation acquires a durable procedural form. In practical terms, serial transnational governance requires harmonized management planning across components, agreed monitoring indicators, and routine inter-state coordination, which turns the heritage label into a standing platform for presence rather than a one-off symbolic gesture. At the same time, transnationality increases sensitivity to the distribution of “voice” and to narrative competition. Under conditions of asymmetric resources and interpretive influence, the project may be perceived as an instrument of dominance, which undermines trust and transforms heritage into a field of symbolic contestation.

4. Limits to the Effectiveness of Conversion. The capacity of heritage to function as a resource of soft power diminishes when four factors converge: (1) competition among historical narratives within transnational projects; (2) the risk of dominance by a single interpretive center; (3) the politicization of decisions formally framed as expert-technical; and (4) asymmetries in resources and participant “voice.” Under such conditions, institutional formats may operate not to reinforce trust but to intensify symbolic competition.

Taken together, the findings confirm that the key mechanism through which cultural heritage is incorporated into China’s foreign policy as a resource of cultural soft power lies in the institutionalization of meanings through international regimes of recognition and governance. By contrast, symbolic attractiveness alone, in the absence of procedural fixation, does not generate a sustainable effect.

Discussion

The findings refine the debate on China’s soft power by demonstrating that, in the domain of heritage, the primary source of foreign policy effect is not “culture as such,” but rather the procedures of international recognition and governance that render cultural meanings reproducible and durable [2; 4; 5; 7; 13]. In this respect, heritage diplomacy differs from cultural diplomacy in the narrow sense: its effects are generated through regime rules, expert procedures, and governance standards that translate symbolic resources into a long-term infrastructure of presence.

This logic aligns with the classical understanding of soft power as an effect of attractiveness and legitimacy [1], while refining it in relation to China. The constraints of soft power are linked not only to the perception of values, but also to the ways in which cultural meanings are embedded in internationally recognized regimes [2]. From the perspective of heritage diplomacy scholarship, heritage

functions as a diplomatic resource precisely because recognition and governance procedures stabilize interpretations and distribute responsibility among actors [4; 5]. At the same time, “Silk Roads” projects demonstrate that institutionalization itself may become a field of geocultural competition, when regimes are employed to reinforce a dominant interpretive center and to reconfigure the symbolic geography of the route [8; 9].

Simultaneously, the “Silk Roads” framework heightens sensitivity to symbolic politics and interpretive competition. For Central Asia, the practical implication lies in the need for multi-perspectival interpretation of the route, procedural equality, and transparency in joint governance decisions. When these conditions are met, heritage strengthens trust and cooperation; when they are violated, it turns into a site of geocultural rivalry.

From an applied perspective, this implies that soft power through heritage should be designed not only as a communicative strategy but also as an architecture of shared governance. Participation in nomination dossiers, transparency of expert procedures, coordinated management plans, and monitoring mechanisms reduce the risk of politicization and enhance trust in the project [10; 13]. For Kazakhstan, such an approach is essential to preserving interpretive plurality and reinforcing procedural equality within transnational formats [11].

Conclusion

The article demonstrates that cultural heritage functions as a resource of China’s cultural soft power insofar as it is institutionalized within international regimes of recognition and governance. The civilizational framework and the “Silk Roads” narrative enhance foreign policy legitimacy and attractiveness; however, the durability of outcomes is supported by procedural mechanisms – expert evaluation, the language of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), management planning, and monitoring – that fix interpretations and create an infrastructure of long-term cultural presence.

The limits of effectiveness are associated with competition among interpretations, the risk of dominance by a single interpretive center, the politicization of formally “technical” decisions, and asymmetries in resources and participant “voice.” The scholarly contribution of the study lies in reconstructing the mechanism “discourse → institution → effect/constraints,” which makes it possible to distinguish between conditions that foster trust and those that generate symbolic competition in regional contexts.

A promising direction for future research is the integration of procedural analyses of heritage institutionalization with perception data and expert interviews in participating countries. Such an approach would allow for a more precise assessment of the relationship between governance regimes and the dynamics of trust.

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**МӘДЕНИ ЖҰМСАҚ КҮШ ЖӘНЕ ӨРКЕНИЕТТІК МЕМЛЕКЕТ:
ҚЫТАЙДЫҢ СЫРТҚЫ САЯСАТЫНДА
МӘДЕНИ МҰРАНЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУ**

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Аңдатпа. Мақалада Қытайдың мәдени мұраны сыртқы саясатта «мәдени жұмсақ күштің» ресурсы ретінде, «өркениеттік мемлекет» тұжырымдамасы аясында қалай пайдаланатыны талданады. Зерттеудің мақсаты - мұраны символдық капиталдан тұрақты сыртқы саяси әсерге айналдыру тетігін реконструкциялау және осы тетіктің трансұлттық алаңдардағы шектеулерін айқындау.

Зерттеу сапалық дизайнға негізделіп, ҚХР-дың ресми жария мәтіндеріне (2013–2024 жж.) контенттік және дискурстық талдауды ЮНЕСКО-ның Бүкіләлемдік мұра режимінің институционалдық материалдарын талдаумен ұштастырады. Эмпирикалық фокус ретінде өркениеттік риторика, байланыстылық жобалары және халықаралық мойындау рәсімдері тоғысатын түйінді алаң - «Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an–Tianshan Corridor» сериялық трансұлттық нысаны (ID 1442) таңдалды.

Зерттеу нәтижелері «жұмсақ күш» әсері ең алдымен мағыналарды институционалдандыру арқылы қалыптасатынын көрсетеді: өркениеттік аргументация мен «Жібек жолы» нарративін халықаралық легитимация тіліне (Outstanding Universal Value), сараптамалық рәсімдерге, басқару жоспарларымен мониторингке көшіру интерпретацияларды тұрақтандырып, ұзақ мерзімді мәдени қатысудың инфрақұрылымын қалыптастырады. Процедуралық бекіту болмаған жағдайда мәдени тартымдылықтың өзі тұрақты нәтиже бере алмайтыны көрсетілді.

Мұраны конверсиялау үдерісінің бірқатар шектеулері анықталды: «ортақ тарих» интерпретацияларының бәсекелестігі, бір интерпретациялық орталықтың үстемдік ету қаупі, формалды түрде «техникалық» шешімдердің саясаттандырылуы, сондай-ақ қатысушылар арасындағы ресурстар мен «дауыс» асимметриясы. Бұл факторлар сенімді әлсіретіп, символдық бәсекелестікті күшейтуі мүмкін.

Зерттеудің ғылыми құндылығы дискурстық, институционалдық және өңірлік талдау деңгейлерін байланыстыруында, сондай-ақ «дискурс → институт → әсер/шектеулер» атты түсіндірмелік логиканы ұсынуында. Практикалық маңыздылығы Орталық Азия елдері (оның ішінде Қазақстан)

үшін трансұлттық номинациялар аясында процедуралық теңқұқықтылықты, бірлескен басқарудың ашықтығын және мұраны көпқырлы интерпретациялауды қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған ұсынымдармен айқындалады.

Тірек сөздер: жұмсақ күш, мәдени жұмсақ күш, өркениеттік мемлекет, мұра дипломатиясы, ЮНЕСКО, Жібек жолдары, Қытайдың сыртқы саясаты, Орталық Азия, трансұлттық мұра

КУЛЬТУРНАЯ МЯГКАЯ СИЛА И ЦИВИЛИЗАЦИОННОЕ ГОСУДАРСТВО: ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ ВО ВНЕШНЕЙ ПОЛИТИКЕ КИТАЯ»

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается, как Китай использует культурное наследие во внешней политике в качестве ресурса «культурной мягкой силы» в рамках представления о «цивилизационном государстве». Цель исследования – реконструировать механизм конверсии наследия из символического капитала в устойчивый внешнеполитический эффект и определить ограничения такого механизма на транснациональных площадках. Исследование опирается на качественный дизайн и сочетает контент- и дискурс-анализ официальных публичных текстов КНР (2013–2024) с анализом институциональных материалов режима Всемирного наследия ЮНЕСКО; эмпирический фокус – серийный транснациональный объект «Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an – Tianshan Corridor» (ID 1442) как узловую площадку, где пересекаются цивилизационная риторика, проекты связности и международные процедуры признания. Показано, что «мягкосиловой» эффект формируется прежде всего через институционализацию смыслов: перевод цивилизационной аргументации и «шёлкового» нарратива в язык международной легитимации (OUV), экспертные процедуры, планы управления и мониторинг, которые стабилизируют интерпретации и создают инфраструктуру длительного культурного присутствия. Сделан вывод, что без процедурной фиксации культурная привлекательность не обеспечивает устойчивого результата. Выявлены ограничения конверсии: конкуренция интерпретаций «общей истории», риск доминирования одного интерпретационного центра, политизация формально «технических» решений и асимметрия ресурсов

и «голоса» участников, что может ослаблять доверие и провоцировать символическое соперничество. Ценность работы состоит в связке дискурсивного, институционального и регионального уровней анализа и в предложении объяснительной логики «дискурс → институт → эффект/ограничения». Практическая значимость связана с рекомендациями для стран Центральной Азии (включая Казахстан) по обеспечению процедурного равноправия, прозрачности совместного управления и многоакурсной интерпретации наследия в транснациональных номинациях.

Ключевые слова: мягкая сила, культурная мягкая сила, цивилизационное государство, дипломатия наследия, ЮНЕСКО, Шёлковые пути, внешняя политика Китая, Центральная Азия, транснациональное наследие

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