

CULTURAL GEOPOLITICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: HOW NATIONS SHAPE GLOBAL POWER THROUGH CULTURAL INFLUENCE

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Abstract: *This article explores the emergence of cultural geopolitics as a central dimension of global power in the 21st century. It examines how nations use media, entertainment, language, digital platforms, and cultural industries to shape international perceptions and strengthen geopolitical influence. Through the examples of South Korea, Türkiye, the United States, and China, the study demonstrates that cultural products have become powerful strategic tools capable of reshaping global values and political alignments. The article concludes that cultural influence, rather than military or economic dominance, is becoming the defining criterion of global leadership in the contemporary era.*

Key words: *cultural geopolitics, soft power, global influence, cultural diplomacy, media industries, K-pop, Turkish dramas, Hollywood, Cultural Silk Road, international relations*

Annotatsiya: *Ushbu maqolada XXI asrda geo-madaniyatning global ta'sirining asosiy omiliga aylanishi tahlil qilinadi. Davlatlarning media, kino, musiqa, til, texnologiya va yumshoq kuch strategiyalari orqali xalqaro obro' yaratish jarayoni yoritiladi. Janubiy Koreya, Turkiya, AQSh va Xitoy misolida madaniy mahsulotlarning geosiyosiy ta'siri ko'rsatib beriladi. Tadqiqot madaniy kuch zamonaviy xalqaro munosabatlarning markaziy komponentiga aylanayotganini ta'kidlaydi.*

Kalit soʻzlar: madaniy geosiyosat, yumshoq kuch, global taʼsir, madaniy diplomatiya, media sanoati, K-pop, turk seriallari, Gollivud, Madaniy Ipak yoʻli, xalqaro munosabatlar

Аннотация: В статье рассматривается феномен культурной геополитики как ключевого фактора глобального влияния в XXI веке. Анализируется, каким образом государства используют медиа, киноиндустрию, музыкальные течения, язык, цифровые платформы и массовую культуру для формирования международного имиджа и укрепления политического влияния. На примерах Южной Кореи, Турции, США и Китая показано, что культурные продукты становятся стратегическими инструментами, способными менять мировые ценности, общественное мнение и расстановку сил. Делается вывод о том, что культурное влияние постепенно превращается в решающий критерий мировой лидерской позиции, вытесняя традиционные механизмы силы

Ключевые слова культурная геополитика, мягкая сила, глобальное влияние, культурная дипломатия, медиаиндустрия, К-поп, турецкие сериалы, Голливуд, культурный шелковый путь, международные отношения

Introduction

In the 21st century, power is no longer defined solely by military capabilities or economic superiority. Instead, cultural influence—expressed through language, media, music, cinema, lifestyle, and digital presence—has emerged as a fundamental geopolitical tool. This shift reflects the rise of cultural geopolitics, a concept describing how states use cultural production to shape global perception and extend influence beyond traditional diplomacy.

From K-pop and Turkish dramas to Hollywood and China's "Cultural Silk Road," cultural products have become instruments of international soft power and strategic identity-building. This article explores how nations actively construct

global influence through cultural narratives, aesthetic dominance, and digital engagement.

The Rise of Cultural Geopolitics

Cultural geopolitics extends beyond Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. While soft power aims to attract, cultural geopolitics goes further: it reshapes global norms, values, and aesthetic standards.

Three global processes drive this rise:

1. Digital globalization, which accelerates cultural exchange.
2. Media convergence, enabling cultural products to reach worldwide audiences.
3. Identity politics, where states seek recognition and prestige.

As a result, cultural industries have become strategic national assets used for ideological, diplomatic, and economic purposes.

South Korea: A Model of Cultural Power

South Korea's global rise demonstrates how culture can transform a nation's geopolitical position.

K-pop as a geopolitical engine

Groups like BTS, BLACKPINK, and EXO have:

- reshaped global youth culture,
- boosted Korean exports and tourism,
- increased the global study of the Korean language,
- strengthened South Korea's diplomatic profile.

K-pop is not merely entertainment—it is a state-supported soft power project that amplifies South Korea's international standing.

K-dramas and cultural identity

Series such as *Squid Game* and *Crash Landing on You* portray Korea as modern, technologically advanced, and emotionally appealing. Through these narratives, South Korea establishes a positive civilizational image, increasing its geopolitical leverage.

Türkiye: Expanding Influence Through Television

Turkish television series dominate markets across the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and the Balkans.

Cultural diplomacy through storytelling

Historical dramas like *Diriliş Ertuğrul* and *Magnificent Century* promote:

- national pride,
- historical continuity,
- an idealized image of Turkish governance.

Romantic dramas, on the other hand, export Turkish lifestyle and social norms.

Türkiye's series reach more than 150 countries, positioning the nation as a major cultural actor and extending its influence far beyond its borders.

The United States: Hollywood as a Century-Long Hegemon

Hollywood remains the world's most powerful cultural apparatus.

Through film, America exports its core values:

- individual freedom,
- entrepreneurship,
- democracy,
- technological progress.

Marvel, Disney, and Netflix produce narratives reinforcing American global dominance.

Hollywood's reach, spanning over 190 countries, is often more influential than traditional diplomacy.

China: Constructing a Global Cultural Sphere

China's cultural strategy is rapidly expanding through the "Cultural Silk Road."

Confucius Institutes

Operating in more than 100 countries, they:

- promote Mandarin,
- share Chinese traditions,

- strengthen Beijing's soft power.
- Cinematic modernization

Films such as *The Wandering Earth* portray China as a leader in science and future technologies.

Cultural components within the Belt and Road Initiative

China integrates cultural exchanges, festivals, and educational programs into BRI partnerships, presenting itself as a benevolent global leader.

The New Rules of Cultural Competition

The 21st century has produced new "laws" of cultural geopolitics:

1. **Aesthetics now determine global influence.**
Nations with appealing cultural images gain more international trust.
2. **Digital platforms are modern diplomatic arenas.**
TikTok, YouTube, and Netflix shape global public opinion.
3. **Language is political capital.**
Global interest in Korean, Turkish, and Chinese is rising.
4. **Cultural consumption creates long-term loyalty.**
People admire countries whose stories they watch, hear, or follow.

Challenges and Risks

Despite its benefits, cultural geopolitics presents:

- risks of cultural dominance,
- erosion of local identities,
- algorithmic manipulation,
- geopolitical polarization through media.

States must balance cultural expansion with respect for diversity and critical media literacy.

Conclusion

Cultural geopolitics has become a central component of modern international relations. Nations increasingly compete not through military confrontation, but through influence on global imagination, lifestyle choices, and value systems.

In this new environment, countries with powerful cultural narratives—South Korea, Türkiye, the United States, and China—gain strategic advantages that shape the future of global politics.

The 21st century will belong not only to those who produce technology or weapons, but to those who produce the most compelling stories, aesthetics, and cultural identity.

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