

The Islamic Republic of Iran's Cultural Diplomacy and the Constructed Image of Iran in Central Asia

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Abstract

This article examines the role of cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the image of Iran in Central Asian countries. According to constructivist theory, identity is a flexible and relational phenomenon. This means that regardless of the image that each actor has of himself, the image that other actors present of him plays a fundamental role in the identity and relationships of the actors. Accordingly, actors identity is “constructed” as a flexible phenomenon during interactions. It is constructed under the influence of domestic and international factors. As a result, all actors try to play a role in “building” their image in international system. In this regard, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of five Muslim countries in Central Asia, the Islamic Republic of Iran tried to establish a suitable position in the region. Iran's identity-building efforts in Central Asia are based on the concept of shared cultural heritage. This article investigates the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia. The article examines the image of Iran in the history textbooks of Central Asian countries. Since governments have a monopoly on the administration of their educational system, textbooks can be considered invaluable sources for analyzing the image they intend to create of Iran for future generations. History textbooks of Central Asian countries portray Iran as a minor player. In fact, the historical influence of Iran in this region has been systematically weakened by the secular governments of the region, who have always been concerned about the political narrative of Islam. Considering the importance of textbooks in the construction of Iran's image for the next generation of the region, there is no doubt that Iran's policy-makers should reconsider their cultural diplomacy in the region to correct this image.

Keywords: Central Asia, Iran, Constructivism, Education, History, Identity, Image.

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Introduction

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to structural transformations in the international system and it presented opportunities and challenges to different countries. In the meantime, the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the southern neighbor of the Soviet Union, faced new issues. On the one hand, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the historical threat of the northern neighbor disappeared to a large extent. On the other hand, with the formation of five newly established countries, a new arena was opened for the policy-makers of the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, as in other cases in foreign policy, Iran's policy makers could not form a unique, stable and inclusive policy. There was a group who considered these countries and their people to be parts of the ancient Persian civilization that had now returned to the motherland. In contrast, another group saw them as five Islamic countries that were ready to join the Islamic world after being freed from Communism.

As a result, Iran's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia was shaped according to these two nation-centered and Ummah-centered approaches. In the same framework, based on the general atmosphere of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, one of these two approaches was preferred. Three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we may measure and evaluate the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region. Accordingly, we investigate Iran's cultural policies in the region during the past three decades, examine its results and reflection on the region as a whole, and highlight its strengths and weaknesses. It becomes even more critical when we consider how serious the new rulers of these countries are about defining an independent national identity. In light of their lack of experience in the region's countries, each nation-state attempted to create its own identity. An essential part of this process will be how the region's neighbors' history and image are portrayed and how the region's countries interact.

This article examines Iran's constructed image in Central Asia. The image of actors plays a vital role in how their relationships are

formed. Using constructivism as a theoretical framework, we will examine Iran's constructed image in Central Asian countries due to Iranian cultural diplomacy over the last three decades. Various tools accurately examine Iran's constructed image in Central Asia. Considering the importance of educational resources in forming the image and mindset of future generations and the exclusive role of Central Asian governments in their educational system, studying these resources can give a clear view of the image made of Iran in these countries. As a result, by studying history textbooks in schools and universities in the region, we attempt to identify the constructed image of Iran in these sources and compare it with the image that Iranians have of themselves and their legacy in Central Asia.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Based on the constructivist theory, players' identity is vital in determining their behavior in international relations. Therefore according to constructivists, identity is a dynamic, flexible, under-construction, and most importantly, relational phenomenon. It means that regardless of each player's image of themselves, the image of other players is also significant in shaping their behavior. The most significant result of the collapse of the Soviet Union was an identity change, from the Soviet Union as an anti-system player to players that accepted the existing international order. As a result, the new states—especially those of Central Asia, some of which were experiencing nation-states for the first time in their history—faced a significant challenge in defining their national identity. They needed to develop a new national identity quickly. It was not strange that they tried to define their position compared to other countries and states in the region by presenting a favorable narrative of history. As a result, all neighboring countries tried to play a role in constructing their image in these new states.

This article is the result of qualitative research. A case study method has been used to conduct this research. Case study is used to analyze and carry out a specific research plan and investigate a problem. It examines a person, place, event, phenomenon, or other types of analysis subjects. Its purpose is to use available information to predict future trends. A case study usually examines a single topic

of analysis, but we can also use it as a comparative study to show relationships between two or more topics (Mills, et al., 2010).

Literature Review

Four categories of sources have been used for this article. The first category of the theoretical framework literature is the constructivist theory. Went (1992), in the article “Anarchy is what governments make of it: the social construction of power politics,” emphasizes the social and relational characteristics of identity. He declares that the players’ image of each other plays a vital role in regulating their mutual relationship. At the same time, he mentions the necessary and influential elements in shaping the identity of the players in the international system. He also points out that the most crucial point in defining the players’ identity and mutual behavior is their image or understanding of themselves and others.

Kamran and Karami (2013), in “Examination of relations of Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council from the constructivist perspective,” use the constructivist approach to recognize and investigate Iran’s relations with these countries. The authors believe various factors have led to permanent suspicion between Iran and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Organization member countries. Accordingly, changing this mentality requires reconstructing the foundations and identity concepts of both sides.

The second category of sources deals with the history of confrontation between Iranians and the people of Central Asia. Ashtiani (2008) deals with the history of Iran-Turkmen relations in the book *Ebratnameh*. This book is a historical text written in the Naser al-Din Shah Qajar era. Ashtiani’s detailed account of the events of his captivity in the hands of the Turkmen provides the readers with a precious text to examine and study Iranians-Turkmen relations in that era. His account of the Turkmen’s behavior toward Iranians shows the existing “image” of Iran and Iranians in the eyes of the Turkmen people.

In the book *Russia and Iran in the Great Game*, Andreeva (2009) examines Russian travelers’ points of view on Iranian society in the 18th and 19th centuries. By examining two hundred travelogues written by Russian travelers, this book gives a relatively clear view of

the image of Iran in the eyes of Russians. Blocqueville, in *Note On the Nomads of Turkestan*, recorded his experiences from the war of Merv (2016). This book includes a first-hand narrative of the conditions of the Turkmen-inhabited areas. He also writes about the Turkmen's image of Iran and Iranians. De Gobineau (2007) recorded his observations on the war between Iranians and Turkmen in the book *Turkmen War*. Vambery (1991), in "Voyages of a False Dervish in Central Asia from Tehran to Khiva," presents a detailed account of the conditions of the Central Asian khanates in the 19th century. Milton (2014), in the article "Foreign Cultural Policy of Iran in Central Asia: A Demonstration of Political Pragmatism," discusses Iran's attempt to use its historical and cultural influence and the common historical heritage in Central Asia.

The third category of sources, which is the most crucial one, includes history textbooks in Central Asian countries. Since states have a monopoly over the education system in Central Asian countries, the constructed image of Iran in Central Asia can be regarded as the reflection of the image that the states present to their future generations. Accordingly, we studied several history textbooks in Central Asian countries. The connection of this image with the topic of this article is that this constructed image of Iran can be considered a direct or indirect result of the Islamic Republic of Iran's cultural diplomacy in the region.

The last category of resources includes the websites of the Islamic Republic of Iran's embassies in Central Asia. As the official delegates of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia, they have the leading role in executing Iran's cultural diplomacy in the region. As a result, investigating these websites can be a valuable tool for getting familiar with the expansion and depth of Iran's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia.

Tajikistan

According to the website of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tajikistan, cultural commonality is essential for strengthening ties between the people of the two countries of Iran and Tajikistan. The same historical roots, common language, and common religion,

along with the similarity of national and local traditions, rituals, and social beliefs, have provided unmatched conditions for the development of cultural relations between the two countries. Iranian-Islamic customs and traditions show themselves everywhere in people's lives. Tajiks celebrate Nowruz and religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha. Therefore, in explaining relations between the two nations of Iran and Tajikistan, it can be said that the common culture of these two countries is the basis on which other dimensions and aspects are established. Part of this platform has been created with legal agreements between the two parties in the form of agreements and memorandums of understanding over the past years. Based on this, eight cultural memorandums have been signed between the two countries (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Dushanbe, 1401). However, in the cultural section of the website of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tajikistan, the cultural advisor link is blocked, and the Tajik Persian Culture Research Institute website, established in 1995, is for sale.

Among the countries in the region, Tajikistan has one of the best and most accessible collections of textbooks. The electronic version of all textbooks can be accessed through the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan's website, known as the Ministry of Education. In Tajikistan, history teaching starts from the fifth year of primary school and continues until the end of the student's education. History is taught in two dimensions, world history and the history of the Tajik people. Tajikistan's history textbooks are drawn so that the history of Tajikistan is considered the same as the history of Iran. It means that the Tajik narration of history is, to a great extent, the same as the Iranian narration. However, the Tajiks consider themselves not part of the Persian civilization, but *the* Persian civilization. It means that while the Tajik history books narrate history according to the Persian chronology, they overestimate the Tajiks' role in all historical events.

History of Tajik People for the sixth grade (Ziozoda, 2016) covers the history of Tajik people from the ninth century (the Taherids) to the fourteenth century (the Timurids). The book mentions Iran 120 times. The book is written according to the "Persian" view of history. This book deals with the history of the post-Islamic dynasties formed in Iran. It mentions the damage caused by Genghis and Timur's attack on

Iran (Ziozoda, 2016: 50). Nader Shah's victories in Transoxiana (Ziozoda, 2016: 87), the war between the Safavid Iranians and the Shibani Uzbeks (Ziozoda, 2016: 117), the destructive Uzbek attacks on Khorasan (Ziozoda, 2016: 133), the violence of the Uzbeks in dealing with the Shiites and the Turkmens' attacks to Iranian caravans (Ziozoda, 2016: 279) are among the topics.

The history of the Tajik people for the ninth grade (Otamov, 2013) covers the 19th century until the formation of the Soviet Union. In this book, Iran is mentioned 38 times. The book includes the presence of Tsarist Russia in Central Asia and the anti-colonial movements of the people of Turkistan (Otamov, 2013: 5). Moreover, during the investigation of the region in the 19th century, the religious differences between Shia Iranians and Sunni residents of Central Asia are mentioned (Otamov, 2013: 134).

The history of the Tajik people for the 11th grade (Nabieva, 2011) is about post-Soviet Union Tajikistan. Iran is mentioned sixteen times in this book. The book mentions Iran's presence in Tajikistan during the collapse of the Soviet Union (Nabieva, 2011: 86). It refers to Iran's role in the peace negotiations during the civil war (Nabieva, 2011: 101). It also mentions Iran's economic and industrial aid to Tajikistan (Nabieva, 2011: 126). Cooperation with Iran is mentioned as one of the Muslim countries (Nabieva, 2011: 173). It is noteworthy that in referring to the role of Iran in Tajikistan, this country Iran is referred to like other neighbors and countries of the world, and no particular position is considered for Iran (Nabieva, 2011: 177).

Uzbekistan

On the website of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Uzbekistan, there is no trace of a cultural section. The public diplomacy section shows media, news links, Iranian schools, and tourism in Iran (the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tashkent, 1401). History textbooks in Uzbekistan can be accessed on the Ministry of Education of Uzbekistan's website. History education in Uzbekistan starts in the fifth grade, and history is taught through two sets of books -The general history and History of Uzbekistan. To better examine the image of Iran in history textbooks in Uzbekistan,

we divided history into pre-Islamic, post-Islamic, and contemporary eras. . In ancient history, which includes the pre-Islam era, compared to China and Rome, they did not attach much importance to Iran as one of the ancient civilizations. In the sources which deal with the post-Islamic era, there is a systematic attempt to downplay Iran's role in the region. The authors have almost no reference to the influence and dominance of Persian culture and language in the region. Furthermore, Iran's role is least mentioned in the sources related to the Middle Ages to the 19th century. The efforts of the authors to trivialize the role of Iranian culture in the region go so far that when introducing the scientists of the region, it is not even mentioned that they belonged to the Persian culture. However, when examining contemporary history, careful attention has been paid to the internal situation of Iran. In the sources about the post-independence era, significant references have been made to Iran and its internal situation. The most realistic image of Iran is in the section related to contemporary history.

World history for the 10th grade (Ergashev, 2017) focuses on 1918 to 1991. Iran is mentioned 42 times in this book. Paying more attention to Iran's situation in this period of history, which was associated with Iran's weakness and disillusionment, is significant compared to the neglect of Iran in the golden age of Central Asia, which was associated with Iran's dominance and superiority. In this book, the extinction of the Qajar dynasty (Ergashev, 2017: 57) and the modernization of Iran by Reza Shah (Ergashev, 2017: 81), the services of Mohammad Reza Shah as a modern and educated person (Ergashev, 2017: 122), and the Islamic Revolution are noteworthy. In this book, The Islamic revolution is presented as the overthrow of the Shah by "religious fanatics". Moreover, we noted that the book exaggerates the religious orders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the prohibition of music, cinema, dance, alcohol, chess, and compulsory hijab (Ergashev, 2017: 122).

In referring to the post-Islamic era, there is a systematic attempt to downplay Iran's role in the region. The authors have almost no reference to the influence and dominance of Persian culture in the region. Iran's role is insignificant in the sources from the Middle Ages to the 19th century. The efforts of the authors to trivialize the role of

Iranian culture in the region go so far that the Persian originality of great scientists of this era is not mentioned. While examining contemporary history, careful attention has been paid to Iran's internal situation. Several references to Iran and its internal situation are found in the sources dealing with the post-independence era. Uzbek textbooks are the only ones in Central Asia that attempt to paint a picture of the Islamic Republic of Iran, however unreliable it may be.

History of Uzbekistan for the 7th grade (Mohammadzhanov, 2017) is an excellent example of Iran's constructed image in the educational resources of Uzbekistan. In this book, Iran is mentioned 32 times. The author obviously tries to remove Iran from the region's history. While he introduces significant scientists such as al-Khwarizmi, al-Biruni, and Avicenna as influential figures of their era, their Persian origin is wholly forgotten (Mohammadzhanov, 2017:4). In the following, the book talks about the Islamic era. During the introduction of the Samanid dynasty, there was no mention of their Persian origin. Their role in developing the Persian language and culture is also unseen (Mohammadzhanov, 2017: 46). Another topic of interest in the book is the Mongol attack (Mohammadzhanov, 2017: 57).

Turkmenistan

There is a culture section on the website of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Turkmenistan. In this section, we come across links that include the link of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, the Cultural Heritage Organization, the cultural consultation of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic in Ashgabat, and the Ministry of Culture of Turkmenistan. The link to cultural consultation does not lead anywhere (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Ashgabat, 1401). Turkmenistan is the only Central Asian country with a land border with Iran. On the other hand, about two million Iranians of Turkmen origin on the border of the two countries have formed deep historical, cultural, and social ties between the people on both sides of the border. In the years after the independence of Turkmenistan, there has been a deep relationship between the two neighbors.

Among Central Asian countries, access to educational resources in Turkmenistan is more complex than in others. Due to some restrictions, it is impossible to access Turkmenistan's textbooks through the website of the Ministry of Education. However, some electronic libraries include historical books. History textbooks in Turkmenistan have an interesting perspective. Since the region known as Turkmenistan today was under the cultural influence and political domination of the central government of Iran throughout history, an attempt has been made to present another narrative of history. In these books, while emphasizing the ancient history of the Turkmen people and their significant role in the Islamic civilization, Iran's cultural influence and political dominance have been dimmed and erased. These books not only marginalize Iran's influence and superiority but also talk about the domination of Turkmen governments over Iranians. Despite introducing Persian-speaking thinkers and scientists in these books, there is no mention of their primary language and culture. Here we examine some of these resources.

History of World Civilizations (Chakanov, 2010) is a teaching resource for undergraduate students. This book deals with the formation of civilization from ancient Greece to modern times. In this book, as in other sources, there is an apparent lack of attention to Iran's role in forming world civilization. In this book, Iran and Iranians are mentioned only seven times. Meanwhile, for example, the name of Rome is mentioned 75 times, the name of Byzantium 23 times, and China 93 times. Moreover, there is a tendency to downplay Iran's role and position in the history of the world. The author tries to avoid paying attention to the role of Iranian civilization in world history as much as possible. Regarding Iran, emphasis is placed on the Arab attack (Chakanov, 2010: 77).

The history of Turkmenistan in the middle ages (Hatamow, 2009) covers the 10th century AD to the Mongol conquests. This book is a source for undergraduate students. This book mentions Iran and Iranians 12 times. It introduces the Ghaznavids as a Turkmen dynasty (Hatamow, 2009:11). One of the interesting stories is the relationship between Sultan Mahmoud Ghaznavi and Ferdowsi. In this regard, parts of the Shahnameh have also been translated into the Turkmen language (Hatamow, 2009: 23). However, Ferdowsi's role in

strengthening the Persian language is not mentioned. It also talks about the Seljukids as Turkmen people and the formation of their monarchy (Hatamow, 2009: 30). In the narration of the Seljukids history, Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk and his role in the Seljukid government are also mentioned. However, the author does not mention his Iranian origin and he is called the minister of the Seljuk Turkmen government (Hatamow, 2009:75).

History of Iran (Meretdurdyew, 2010) is a textbook for history students. This book is the best example of Iran's image in Turkmenistan's educational system. This book narrates Iran's history from the 7th century AD to the present day. The beginning of the book introduces the geography of Iran. The authors introduce Turkmenistan not as a part of the historical territory of Iran but as an independent country next to Iran. For example, we read that:

“Iran and Turkmenistan have had close economic and cultural relations throughout their long history of living close to each other. As a result, the shared experience of the two countries has made a significant contribution to world civilization”(Hatamow, 2009: 4). Another interesting point is the non-mention of Turkmens among Iran's ethnic minorities.. In the section related to the Muslim conquest of Persia, Arabic sources are used to narrate the history. In this book, the occupation of Turkmenistan by the Arabs is mentioned. This is another sign of the recognition of Turkmenistan as an independent state (Hatamow, 2009:11). In introducing historical works, Beyhaghi History is known as a book on the relationship between Turkmen and Arabs (Hatamow, 2009:12). In examining the history of the Abbasid dynasty, Iran and the Abbasid caliphate have been considered one.

Regarding the period after the Mongols' rule until the 20th century, attention has been paid to the introduction of important literary and scientific works of that era instead of narrating critical historical events. Ancestors of the Safavid dynasty are attributed to the Turkmens (Hatamow, 2009:169). Moreover, Nadershah Afshar is also introduced as a Turkmen King whose most important soldiers were Turkmen (Hatamow, 2009:178). When narrating the 19th century, the author does not mention the wars between Iran and the Turkmens and the slavery, theft and looting of the Iranians by the Turkmens.

Kyrgyzstan

The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Kyrgyzstan has a cultural section. According to the culture section, the basis of cultural cooperation and interactions between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Kyrgyz Republic is the cultural agreement document, which was signed by the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1993 and approved by the Islamic Parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Bishkek, 1401). The culture department of Iran's embassy in Bishkek is one of the most active examples in Central Asia. It has done cultural activities such as Persian language training courses, cooperation with the libraries of Kyrgyzstan, and holding cultural festivals.

History education in Kyrgyzstan starts in the fifth grade. In Kyrgyzstan, history textbooks are divided into two categories: world history and Kyrgyzstan history. The place of Iran in history textbooks is limited to ancient times. These books have almost eliminated Iran's cultural influence and political dominance in Central Asia in the post-Islamic period. Also, there is no significant information about the contemporary developments of Iran in the sources of history education in schools and universities of Kyrgyzstan. Studying the history textbooks in Kyrgyzstan indicates that the Kyrgyz consider themselves part of the Turkish-speaking society and also pay great attention to their historical connection with China and Russia. Accordingly, they have not defined a meaningful historical connection with Iran and do not pay much attention to the Persian language.

History of Kyrgyzstan for the seventh grade (Chorotegin, 2012) covers the history of Kyrgyzstan from the 9th to the 18th century. There are 18 references to Iran in the book. This book also mentions China 66 times. The first thing to note is that there are several Iranian ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan (Chorotegin, 2012: 6). There is a mention of the historical conflicts between Iran and Turan in the Shahnameh (Chorotegin, 2012: 25). The Ghaznavid dynasty is also considered without mentioning its Persian origins (Chorotegin, 2012: 34). The following discusses the Mongols and Tamerlane's campaigns to Iran (Chorotegin, 2012: 90). This book considers Iranians as one of the tribes living in Central Asia, mainly in conflict and sometimes under the rule of Turks and Mongols (Chorotegin, 2012: 112).

Kyrgyz history (Kashgari, 2016), compiled for undergraduate students of various disciplines, deals with the history of Kyrgyzstan from ancient times to the present day. This book examines the relationship of Kyrgyz with neighboring tribes (Kashgari, 2016: 3). While Iran is mentioned 9 times, China is mentioned 93 times in this book. The Iranian origin of the Scythians, the Persian language of the ancient tribes living in the region (Kashgari, 2016: 6), the occupation of Iran by the Mongols (Kashgari, 2016: 12), the biography of Genghis Khan and his campaign in Iran (Kashgari, 2016: 52), and the Achaemenid campaign to Central Asia (Kashgari, 2016: 83) are among the topics related to Iran.

History of Kyrgyzstan (Chotaeva, 2016), which is common among students from various fields in universities of Kyrgyzstan, has a general view of the formation of the Kyrgyz nation from the prehistoric era to the present day. The remarkable point is the division of history based on the periods of the political influence of different ethnic groups. For example, the period of Turk- Mongol rule, Russian rule, and Soviet rule are divided. This book mentions Iran and Persian relatively 29 and 36 times. China is mentioned 73 times, as is "Chinese" 75 times. In this book, the superiority of Turks over Iranians has been mentioned many times (Chotaeva, 2016: 12). It is also mentioned that the ancient tribes living in Central Asia spoke Persian (Chotaeva, 2016:22). In addition, Darius the Great's war with the Scythians has been noted (Chotaeva, 2016: 33). Mentioning the power of the Hephthalites and their superiority over the Iranians (Chotaeva, 2016: 42), the wars between Iran and Rome and Manichaeism are also of interest (Chotaeva, 2016: 44). Reference to the Iranian origin of the Samanids(Chotaeva,2016:50), reference to Ferdowsi and Shahnameh (Chotaeva, 2016: 60), reference to Tamerlane's conquests in Iran, and the rule of his descendants in Iran (Chotaeva, 2016: 65) are also important. In this book, despite many references to the Persian language, Iranians are mentioned only as one of the ethnic groups living in the region. Iran's cultural influence and political dominance over the region are not considered. According to the author's point of view, Turks and Mongols have dominated the region for thousands of years, from 500 to 1500 AD, and there is no sign of Iranian influence and domination.

Kazakhstan

There is a cultural and media section on the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran's website in Nursultan. This section includes links such as Kazakh media, press releases, cultural consultation, and scientific and academic cooperation. Of these, the link related to cultural consultation does not lead anywhere (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Nursultan, 2022).

One can refer to the Ministry of Education of Kazakhstan's website to access Kazakh history textbooks. In Kazakhstan, history education starts from the fifth grade, and history is taught in two categories: world history and Kazakh history. The general trend of Kazakh textbooks is very similar to the current trend in Kyrgyzstan. As such, the reference to Iran is limited to the pre-Islam era and Iran's position in the region is known only as one of its neighbors. As a result, despite the profound influence of the Persian language and culture in parts of today's Kazakhstan, there is no mention of this issue. Even in cases where the authors introduce scientists such as Avicenna, Al-Farabi, and Al-Biruni, their Persian origin is not mentioned.

World history for the fifth grade (Bukieva, et al., 2017) is the first history textbook for students in Kazakhstan's schools. This book deals with the history of human societies from the beginning to the ancient Roman era. There are 5 mentions of Iran in this book, compared to 36 mentions of China and 60 mentions of Rome. About Iran, there is a reference to the Parthian kingdom (Bukieva et al., 2017: 46) and trade between Iran and India (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 56). In this book, a separate chapter is dedicated to each of the two empires of China and Rome.

History and people of Kazakhstan for the eighth grade (Masanov, 2000) describes the history of the Kazakh people from the beginning to independence. At the same time, examining the history of this country also examines the ethnic groups living in Kazakhstan. This book has approximately 50 mentions of Iran and Iranians and about 130 mentions of China. Here, attention is paid to Iran during ancient times and the reign of the Soviet Union. There is not much mention of the role of Iranian culture in Central Asia during the Golden Age of Islam. For example, the Aryans and the Scythians' Iranian origins are mentioned (Bukieva et al., 2017: 23). Other examples are the wars

between the Iranians and the Turks in the pre-Islamic era (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 41) and between the Safavids and the Shibani Uzbeks in the 16th century (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 141). Kazakhs' migration to Iran in the 1940s during the great famine is also mentioned (Bukieva, et.al., 2017: 414).

Kazakhstan's history (Kuzembaili, 2006) is compiled for students of various disciplines and tries to familiarize them with the history of Kazakhstan. This book discusses the origin and development of the Kazakh people, administrative, judicial, economic, cultural, public, and social relations in Kazakhstan (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 7). In this book, like in other instances, the authors present Kazakhstan as a part of the Turkic world. Iran is mentioned 25 times, and China is mentioned 91 times. The Iranian origin of the Scythians (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 34) and the presence of the Achaemenids in Kazakhstan (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 35) have been mentioned. Also, Iran has been introduced as one of the great empires of history alongside Rome (Bukieva, et al., 2017: 41). In the history of the 20th century, the migration of some Kazakhs to Iran has been mentioned (Bukieva, et.al., 2017: 291).

Conclusion

Central Asian states, thirty years after independence, are still trying to form their national identities. To do this, they need to define the position of their "nation" among neighboring countries with a long history of relations. In this process, neighboring countries tried to take part in the "construction" of their image. As a result, besides political and economic policies, they introduced some cultural policies to advance their influence in this region. According to the official documents, the Islamic Republic of Iran also views cultural diplomacy as a powerful instrument in Central Asia, forming bilateral and regional relations.

In this article, we tried to examine the influence of Iran's cultural diplomacy in the "construction" of Iran's image in the Central Asian countries. Accordingly, we studied some history textbooks in these countries to analyze Iran's image. As the states have an exclusive role in the educational system of these countries, Iran's image in these texts is a good reflection and the result of the cultural diplomacy of

the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this framework, we have searched the name of Iran in several history textbooks and compared it with other neighboring cultures. It was found that the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the countries of the Central Asian region, if it existed, could not fulfill its expected function, i.e. creating a positive, necessary and convincing image of Iran in the region. The importance of the passivity or inefficiency of the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Central Asian region increases when we put it next to Turkey's recent efforts to jointly compile history textbooks in the countries of the region. While other neighbors in the region, especially China and Turkey, are strongly implementing cultural programs in the countries of the region, the passivity of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the region can pave the way for Iran's competitors in the long term. . From this point of view, it seems that the cultural policy-makers of the Islamic Republic of Iran should first review their cultural diplomacy in the region to recognize the current position of Iran in the region compared to other Central Asian neighbors. In the second step, it is necessary to accurately identify the existing fields to expand and deepen mutual cultural dependences. In addition, Iran should refrain from policies and actions that cause concern to regional governments. In the end, the Islamic Republic of Iran should define new cultural projects to present a positive and constructive image of Iran as a historically significant player in Central Asia. In the medium term, these projects can consolidate Iran's position in Central Asia and in the long run, empower Iran's national interests in the region.

Authors' Statement: The author declare that they have fully complied with all ethical requirements regarding issues such as plagiarism, publication and/or duplicate submission, redundancy, forgery and/or falsification of data, informed consent, misconduct, etc.

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