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**ЖАЛПЫ ТАРИХЫ
ВСЕОБЩАЯ ИСТОРИЯ
THE WORLD HISTORY**

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**THE ROLE OF WOMEN SCHOLARS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PEOPLE'S
DIPLOMACY IN CENTRAL ASIAN STATES (1991-2025)**

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Abstract: The article examines the role of women in strengthening people's diplomacy, cultural and humanitarian ties, friendship, and good-neighbourly relations among the states and peoples of Central Asia. The contribution of Central Asian women is considered in three interrelated dimensions: scholarly research on the theoretical foundations of interethnic relations and people's diplomacy; practical participation in the development of people's diplomacy; and the activities of women compatriots abroad who promote the international image of the region. Based on a comparative review of scholarly works, biographical materials, institutional practices, and public initiatives, the study highlights the scientific, diplomatic, cultural, and civic engagement of prominent women from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The findings indicate that women's participation constitutes an important human and institutional resource for regional cooperation, mutual understanding, and the international representation of Central Asia.

Keywords: people's diplomacy, Central Asia, women scholars, interethnic relations, cultural and humanitarian cooperation, friendship societies, civil society, compatriot organisations

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**ОРТАЛЫҚ АЗИЯ МЕМЛЕКЕТТЕРІНІҢ ХАЛЫҚТЫҚ ДИПЛОМАТИЯСЫН
ДАМУДАҒЫ ҒАЛЫМ ӘЙЕЛДЕРДІҢ РӨЛІ (1991-2025)**

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Түйін: Мақалада Орталық Азия мемлекеттері мен халықтары арасындағы халықтық дипломатияны, мәдени-гуманитарлық байланыстарды, достық пен тату көршілік қатынастарды нығайтудағы әйелдердің рөлі қарастырылады. Орталық Азия әйелдерінің үлесі өзара байланысты үш бағыт бойынша талданады: ұлтаралық қатынастар мен халықтық дипломатияның теориялық негіздерін ғылыми тұрғыдан зерттеу; халықтық дипломатияны дамытуға практикалық қатысу; өңірдің халықаралық беделін ілгерілетуге ықпал ететін шетелдегі отандас әйелдердің қызметі. Ғылыми еңбектерге, өмірбаяндық материалдарға, институционалдық тәжірибеге және қоғамдық бастамаларға жасалған салыстырмалы шолу негізінде Өзбекстан, Қазақстан, Қырғызстан, Тәжікстан және Түрікменстанның көрнекті әйелдерінің ғылыми, дипломатиялық, мәдени және азаматтық қызметі көрсетіледі. Зерттеу нәтижелері әйелдердің қатысуы өңірлік ынтымақтастықты, өзара түсіністікті және Орталық

Азияның халықаралық деңгейде таныстырылуын қамтамасыз ететін маңызды адами әрі институционалдық ресурс екенін көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: халықтық дипломатия, Орталық Азия, ғалым әйелдер, ұлтаралық қатынастар, мәдени-гуманитарлық ынтымақтастық, достық қоғамдары, азаматтық қоғам, отандастар ұйымдары

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РОЛЬ ЖЕНЩИН-УЧЁНЫХ В РАЗВИТИИ НАРОДНОЙ ДИПЛОМАТИИ ГОСУДАРСТВ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ (1991-2025)

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Аннотация: В статье рассматривается роль женщин в укреплении народной дипломатии, культурно-гуманитарных связей, дружбы и добрососедских отношений между государствами и народами Центральной Азии. Вклад женщин Центральной Азии анализируется по трём взаимосвязанным направлениям: научное изучение теоретических основ межнациональных отношений и народной дипломатии; практическое участие в развитии народной дипломатии; деятельность женщин-соотечественниц за рубежом, содействующих продвижению международного имиджа региона. На основе сравнительного обзора научных работ, биографических материалов, институциональной практики и общественных инициатив освещается научная, дипломатическая, культурная и гражданская деятельность известных женщин Узбекистана, Казахстана, Кыргызстана, Таджикистана и Туркменистана. Результаты показывают, что участие женщин является важным человеческим и институциональным ресурсом регионального сотрудничества, взаимопонимания и международного представления Центральной Азии.

Ключевые слова: народная дипломатия, Центральная Азия, женщины-учёные, межнациональные отношения, культурно-гуманитарное сотрудничество, общества дружбы, гражданское общество, организации соотечественников.

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to assess and systematise the role of women in the development of people's diplomacy in Central Asia. Its objectives are to identify leading women scholars whose research has contributed to the study of interethnic relations and people's diplomacy, to examine the practical contribution of women through scientific, diplomatic, cultural, and civic activity, and to analyse the role of friendship societies and compatriot organisations in strengthening people-to-people ties and the international visibility of the region.

Women in the region have a distinctive role in strengthening people's diplomacy, cultural and humanitarian ties, friendship, and good-neighbourly relations among the states and peoples of Central Asia. The role of Central Asian women in people's diplomacy can be considered in three principal areas: women scholars engaged in studying the theoretical foundations of interethnic relations and people's diplomacy; women making a practical contribution to the development of people's diplomacy in the Central Asian states; women compatriots abroad who contribute to enhancing the international image of the Central Asian states.

Materials and methods

Theoretical analysis

In discussing women scholars who study the theoretical foundations of interethnic relations and people's diplomacy in Central Asia, particular attention should be paid to the activities of the scientific

school 'History of Interethnic Relations and Tolerance' established by the Uzbek scholar Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor R.H.Murtazayeva.

For nearly three decades, Professor R.H.Murtazayeva's scientific school has studied a wide range of important and consistently relevant issues concerning the history of interethnic relations and tolerance in Uzbekistan. This school is regarded as one of the largest centres of scholarship on interethnic relations not only in Uzbekistan but also in the Central Asian region as a whole.

The scientific school is the outcome of the scholar's extensive research, applied work, and collaborative activity and is increasingly gaining recognition at the international level. This is evidenced by a number of international academic conferences organised on the initiative of the school, as well as Professor R. H. Murtazayeva's active participation in dozens of international conferences held in Kazakhstan (Almaty, 1996, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2014, and 2019), Italy (Bologna, 1996), Russia (Saransk, 2007; Tomsk, 2012), China (Beijing, 2008), Switzerland (Davos, 2013), the United States (New York, 2013), and Uzbekistan. Through these activities, she has drawn the attention of the academic community to the history of interethnic relations and tolerance and to the search for solutions to the most pressing contemporary issues in this field.

Since 2009, R. H. Murtazayeva has also headed the activities of the Olima Association of Women Scholars of Uzbekistan [1, 5-6].

R.H.Murtazayeva is also among the first women scholars in Uzbekistan to have placed sustained emphasis on the academic study of people's diplomacy. On her initiative, the Department of History of Uzbekistan of the Faculty of History at the National University of Uzbekistan organised, for the first time in the country, a national scientific and practical conference on 26–27 May 2017 entitled 'The Place and Role of People's Diplomacy in Strengthening Uzbekistan's Relations of Mutual Friendship and Cooperation with the World Community'. The conference marked a new stage in the scholarly study of people's diplomacy in Uzbekistan.

The study is based on a qualitative review of scholarly works, dissertations, biographical materials, institutional information, and open electronic sources cited in the article. Descriptive, comparative, and historical-comparative approaches are used to systematise evidence from the five Central Asian states and to distinguish academic, practical, and diaspora-related dimensions of women's participation in people's diplomacy. The analysis is limited to the materials identified in the cited literature and does not claim to provide a complete prosopographical survey of all women involved in this field.

Results and discussion

Dilbar Abdurakhmonova is regarded as the first woman conductor not only in Uzbekistan but also in Central Asia. Her repertoire includes more than 60 opera and ballet productions [2, 3].

Doctor of Biological Sciences, Professor Shahlo Turdikulova became the first woman to serve as Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan and is an academician of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS) [3, 2].

Nilufar Mamadalieva is a biochemist whose research focuses on the phytochemical and biological investigation of active compounds in medicinal plants of Central Asia.

In 2011, Nilufar Mamadalieva received the UNESCO–L'Oréal award for young women in the life sciences, and in 2014 she was awarded the Elsevier Foundation Award for Young Women Scientists from Developing Countries [4, 2].

Dilfuza Egamberdieva is a researcher in microbiology. In 2023, she received the prestigious UNESCO Carlos J. Finlay Prize for her research on plant–microbiome interactions, plant stress resistance, soil biology, and microbial diversity [5, 3-4]. She has also received such distinguished awards and fellowships as the Scopus–TWAS–TWOWS Young Women Researcher Award, the Morrison Rogosa Award, the L'Oréal–UNESCO For Women in Science Fellowship, the Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship, and the TWAS Prize in Agricultural Sciences. In 2018, she was elected to a project team of the High Level Panel of Experts under the United Nations Committee on World

Food Security.

Leila Belyalova is an associate professor at Samarkand State University and a senior researcher at the Zarafshan State Nature Reserve. She coordinates international projects aimed at preserving the ornithological biodiversity of the Western Tien Shan mountain range and also participates in the international programmes World Environmental Action, Sprig Aliva, and World Migration Day.

In 2018, Leila Belyalova was included in the BBC's list of 100 influential women worldwide for her work in protecting and developing Uzbekistan's ecosystems [6, 1].

Kazakhstan ranks among the world's top three countries in terms of the share of women researchers, with women accounting for 55.6 per cent of the country's scientists [7, 2].

Damel Mektepbayeva is a researcher, biotechnologist, and chemist. She is described as the first Kazakh woman to have studied at NASA University. She is also an organiser of science festivals and has participated in a number of international competitions and initiatives, including Teacher Prize, Fame Lab, Science Stars, Bolashak, Technovation, Experts Hub, Menin Armanym, and Zhas Project [8, 1-4].

Kunsulu Zakariya is a Doctor of Biological Sciences and professor. She has led scientific and technical programmes comprising more than 200 research projects and has published more than 250 scientific works, including articles in prestigious international journals. She holds 47 invention patents and two international patents. She developed and introduced into production 18 innovative technologies, including vaccines, test systems, and biological preparations. She led the team that developed Kazakhstan's national QazVac vaccine against COVID-19 and served as an adviser and expert on the technological direction of the first full-cycle immunobiological production plant in Central Asia. A specialist in biological safety, she is a Doctor of Biological Sciences, professor, and recipient of numerous awards. She is identified as one of the authors of Kazakhstan's QazVac vaccine. In addition, she has led a number of scientific and technical programmes in biotechnology and microbiology, won two competitions under the World Bank's technology commercialisation programmes, and was included in Techcollectives magazine's ranking of 'prominent women scientists of the world' [9, 2].

Balzhan Bultrikova is regarded as Kazakhstan's first foreign minister and the first Kazakh woman diplomat to speak from the rostrum of the United Nations [10, 5].

Akmaral Khaydarovna Arystanbekova was the first ambassador of independent Kazakhstan and the first woman ambassador in the country's history. She was born in Almaty in 1948 and holds the degrees of Candidate of Chemical Sciences and Doctor of Political Sciences.

She served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan (1989–1991), the country's first Permanent Representative to the United Nations (1992–1999), Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Kazakhstan to France (1999–2003), and Permanent Representative of Kazakhstan to UNESCO (1999–2019).

Arystanbekova worked in international relations for more than 30 years. She was not only the first woman to represent Kazakhstan at the global level but also a multidisciplinary scholar specialising in chemistry and catalysis, history, diplomacy, international law, and political science [11, 1].

The scholarly works of Kazakh women researchers K. A. Zhakenova, D. S. Kazbekova, L. Zh. Abzhaparova, A. B. Sarsembayeva, and S. Isabayeva are also of considerable importance for a comprehensive study of the problem of people's diplomacy in the Central Asian states.

A distinctive feature of K. A. Zhakenova's research is that it covers both the relationship between Kazakhstan's people's diplomacy and official diplomacy and issues relating to the state's national brand concept. D. S. Kazbekova's works analyse the public diplomacy of foreign countries and examine the use of public diplomacy mechanisms in Kazakhstan's foreign-policy practice [12, 2-3].

L.Zh.Abzhaparova and A. B. Sarsembayeva are particularly known for their fundamental research on Kazakhstan's people's diplomacy. Of special significance is their presentation of people's

diplomacy as an important participant in international relations [13, 1520-1523]. S. Isabayeva's research provides a detailed account of Kazakhstan's place in global international relations and its initiatives aimed at resolving the conflicts in Syria and Ukraine [14, 2].

Although Kyrgyz women scholars conducting research on people's diplomacy are not numerous, N. Muratalieva stands out among them. She assigns considerable importance to the role of non-governmental organisations in the development of civil society [15, 2].

Lira Mamanova is a geneticist and a leading researcher at the UK biotechnology company ENHANC3D GENOMICS. She works in the field of DNA and RNA sequencing and previously contributed to the development of technologies for identifying known and novel cell types. Her research has been published in Nature and Science, two of the world's most prestigious scientific journals [16, 1-4].

Asel Sartbayeva is one of the first internationally recognised women scientists from Central Asia. She developed a method of coating vaccines with silica, enabling medical products to be stored without freezing. This invention is of major importance because many vaccines may deteriorate and may even become harmful if they are not kept refrigerated. Professor Asel Sartbayeva of the University of Bath (United Kingdom), a Doctor of Chemistry, member of the United Kingdom's Royal Society, and co-founder of the biotechnology start-up EnsiliTech, developed together with her team a method for preserving vaccines. The method prevents vaccines from deteriorating during transportation. In 2024, the start-up attracted £1.2 million in investment to further develop the technology [17, 2-3].

The literature contains insufficient information about women scholars conducting research on the people's diplomacy of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, suggesting that scholarly debate on people's diplomacy in these countries has not yet been fully developed. Sofia Hakimova was the first Tajik woman to receive the degree of Doctor of Medical Sciences at the age of 33. She was also a public figure who contributed to the development of science in Tajikistan. She established the first human genetics laboratory at a maternity hospital in Dushanbe. In addition to her scholarly achievements, S. Hakimova demonstrated a profound commitment to improving obstetric and gynaecological services in her country [18, 3-5].

Sarajon Yusupova was a Soviet geochemist, an Honoured Worker of Science and Technology of Tajikistan, an academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Tajik SSR, and a Doctor of Geological and Mineralogical Sciences. As the first woman academician in geochemistry in the history of Tajikistan, she gained international recognition in the scientific community for her research on celestine deposits from which radioactive strontium is obtained [19, 1].

According to the Turkmen scholar M. Omelicheva, during the presidency of G. Berdimuhamedov, the resources of people's diplomacy were actively used to improve Turkmenistan's image in the eyes of the international business community and political figures [20, 2]. National branding mechanisms continue to be used today, promoting the country not only through Turkmenistan's rich culture but also through its neutral status. Aksoltan Atayeva, a diplomat and politician, has served as Turkmenistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations since 23 February 1995, making her one of the longest-serving incumbent permanent representatives of any state. A graduate of a medical faculty, A. Atayeva has held a number of other senior positions, including Minister of Health of Turkmenistan, Minister of Social Security, and President of the Trade Unions, and has been a member of the Halk Maslahaty since 1993. She currently serves as Turkmenistan's ambassador to Cuba, Brazil, and Venezuela. In 2019, she was awarded the title Hero of Turkmenistan [21, 2-5].

The contribution of women working within Uzbekistan's 46 existing friendship societies to the practical development of the country's people's diplomacy also deserves recognition. The significant participation and role of women in such friendship societies as Uzbekistan–USA, Uzbekistan–France, Uzbekistan–Bulgaria, Uzbekistan–Afghanistan, Uzbekistan–Japan, Uzbekistan–Germany, Uzbekistan–Malaysia, and Uzbekistan–Italy are clearly reflected in the activities carried out by these

organisations.

The work undertaken by Professor G. N. Akhunova, who for many years served as chair of the Uzbekistan–USA Friendship Society and currently serves as its deputy chair, has made an important contribution to the development of people’s diplomacy between Uzbekistan and the United States. On Professor G. N. Akhunova’s initiative, an international scientific conference entitled ‘The Modern Mahalla of Civil Society in Uzbekistan’ was held in New York in 2013, and on 16 December 2014 a round-table discussion entitled ‘The Role of People’s Diplomacy in Strengthening Friendship between the Peoples of Uzbekistan and the United States’ was organised at Tashkent State University of Economics. The role of women in the development of people’s diplomacy in Uzbekistan is also visible in the activities of non-governmental organisations established by compatriots abroad. In particular, the Yulduz–Central Asia Society, established in Finland in 2004, and the Uzbek Cultural Centre in Lithuania occupy a distinctive place in the development of people’s diplomacy not only in Uzbekistan but also in other Central Asian countries. The Yulduz–Central Asia Society brings together people from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. Since the society was founded, it has been chaired by Mavluda Peiponen, who was born in Bukhara.

One of the principal objectives of the Yulduz–Central Asia Society is to preserve the cultural heritage and traditions of Central Asia and to acquaint the Finnish public with the cultures of the peoples of Central Asia. The society supports interaction among different national cultures and contributes to their preservation and development.

Conclusions

The analysis shows that women’s contribution to people’s diplomacy in Central Asia is multidimensional. It includes the production of scholarly knowledge on interethnic relations and diplomacy, internationally visible scientific and diplomatic achievements, participation in friendship societies and civil-society initiatives, and the work of compatriot organisations abroad. Together, these activities strengthen interpersonal trust, cultural and humanitarian exchange, and the international representation of Central Asian societies.

At the same time, the uneven state of scholarship across the region remains evident: research on Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan is more developed, while materials on Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are comparatively limited. Further comparative studies, shared research databases, and cross-border academic cooperation would enable a more systematic assessment of women’s role in the development of people’s diplomacy and regional cooperation in Central Asia.

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