‘AMERICA OR RUSSIA? WORK OR STUDY?’ SHIFTS IN SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF CENTRAL ASIANS GOING ABROAD—A QUASI-EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN IN KYRGYZSTAN

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ABSTRACT

This Thesis analyzes the various influences of foreign exchange programmes in the United States of America and the Russian Federation on the socio-political worldviews and values of their participants from Central Asia—with the case study of Kyrgyzstan. The Thesis compares implications of U.S.- and Russia-sponsored educational programmes as opposed to self-financed work visa stays on participant worldviews. Utilizing a quasi-experimental design and focus groups (FGs, N=10), shifts in social and political attitudes of Kyrgyzstanis who had been abroad were studied by analyzing their views on the social issues of: women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic pluralism. In addition, political views, specifically the level of pro-American and pro-Russian sentiments of participants were gauged. The quasi-experimental design entailed eight experimental FGs and two control FGs (made up of four to five participants per FG). The study determined that participation in state-sponsored educational exchange programmes in the U.S. increases the level of liberal socio-political worldviews of participants as compared to similar programmes in Russia and as compared to worldviews of Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad. The study also found that participation in self-financed work visa stays in the U.S. and participation in state-sponsored educational programmes and self-financed work programmes in Russia do not influence the level of liberal socio-political views of participants. The study further found that pro-American sentiments are prevalent only for the U.S.-sponsored educational exchange participants (as opposed to self-financed work visa stay participants). On the whole, all participants in the FGs came up to be pro-Russian, however, pro-Russian views appeared to also be higher for Kyrgyzstanis who participate in state-sponsored educational programmes in Russia.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FG</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
</tr>
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<td>Flex</td>
<td>Future Leaders Exchange programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>GRF</td>
<td>Government of the Russian Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>GoK</td>
<td>Government of Kyrgyzstan</td>
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<tr>
<td>GWoT</td>
<td>Global war on terror</td>
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<tr>
<td>IR</td>
<td>International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender</td>
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<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosotrudnichestvo</td>
<td>Russian Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCO</td>
<td>Shanghai Cooperation Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>United States (of America)</td>
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<tr>
<td>UGRAD</td>
<td>Global Undergraduate Exchange Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>USG</td>
<td>U.S. Government</td>
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<tr>
<td>USIA</td>
<td>United States Information Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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<td>WWII</td>
<td>Second World War</td>
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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The United States of America and the Russian Federation invest in public diplomacy by way of educational and cultural programmes. According to a U.S. Department of State report, in 2017, the U.S. funded educational and cultural programmes at US$634 million (USG 2018). The Russian Federation, in turn, provided 15,000 “state-funded spots” in 2018 at Russian universities to international students (Study in Russia 2018). At the same time, the U.S. and Russia are among the top-five destinations for international migration worldwide, which includes labor migration and student mobility (MPI 2018). The above statistics pose the question of the effects of stays abroad on people’s attitudes and worldviews. As a case study, this Thesis looks at changes in worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens who have travelled to Russia or the U.S., primarily to study or to work.

Background

International exchange programmes, scholarships, and training are means of the so-called “third dimension of public diplomacy.” This dimension involves “developing of lasting relationships… through exchanges, training, seminars, conferences…” (Nye 2004, 109). Public diplomacy has been defined by Nicholas Cull as “an international actor’s attempt to manage the international environment through engagement with a foreign public” (quoted in Just 2016, 83), while Kennedy and Lucas (2005) define the term as “efforts to communicate not with foreign governments but with the people themselves” (310). Joseph Nye (2008) concurs. He claims that public diplomacy has the main objective to influence a foreign state by influencing its citizens. Nye holds
the view that public diplomacy is, and in turn yields, “soft power” for the state. It is possible to influence on foreign citizens, or shape foreign citizen’s “minds and hearts” through education, culture, mass media, science, and technologies—all being various modes of soft power (Hukil 2015, 10).

Nye (2004a) coined the term “soft power” in the 1980s and defines it as “getting others to want the outcomes you want,” which he claims “co-opts people rather than coerces them” (7). For Nye, a state can gain the outcomes it wants if there are other countries in the world “admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness” (5). Soft power provides resources to get the desired outcomes without coercion. These resources are “its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)” (Nye 2008, 96). Culture has many instruments to promote the values of a state. For instance, “high culture” is education, art, and literature. Nye (2004) gives credit to academic and scientific exchanges because they are significant for soft power, and stresses that political values such as democracy and human rights are also “powerful sources of attraction” (55). American foreign policy, claims Nye, can produce soft power if it enhances “broadly shared values such as democracy and human rights” (62). Thus, people exchanges or, at minimum, admission of others into one’s society are effective ways to enhance American soft power.

If adherence to human rights norms are one of the ways in which America projects its soft power, Russia has a near-diametrically different view on its own soft power. According to Jill Dougherty (2013), Russia does not have a particular set of standard values to promote its soft power around the globe. In the post-Cold War era, Russia (which had been the core of the USSR for around 70 years) has yet to define
its own grand values and, instead, “takes an ‘oppositional’ approach to soft power, seeking to improve Russia's image by undermining the [Western] narrative [of freedom and human rights as] projected by the United States” (96). What does exist as Russian soft power is directed inward and oriented on uniting its own citizens and also ethnic Russians and russophones abroad.

According to Thomas Just (2016), Russia has not been able to promote a substantially positive image abroad because its public diplomacy draws on national sentiments only; instead of trying to build a dialogue with a foreign audience, Russia has focused on the Russian diasporas, those who are “already most loyal and willing to support Russian foreign policy objectives” (83). For example, “Rossotrudnichestvo” (“Russian Cooperation”) Agency carries out responsibilities in maintaining the Russian Federation’s influence in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) (Dougherty 2013), and has among its objectives the goal to attract people from “the near abroad by organizing festivals and cultural events, maintaining a network of cultural and educational centers, and attracting Russian diaspora and other foreign students to study in Russia” (Just 2016, 86). In Central Asia, Rossotrudnichestvo contributes to educating Central Asians in learning the Russian language. This is beneficial for them as millions of people from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan migrate to Russia for work.

France, in 1883, is thought to have been the first in the world to establish an institution to promote its culture and language abroad. In 1934, the British Council of the United Kingdom was, in turn, established to organize “educational exchanges, cultural exhibitions, and support English language teaching abroad” (Bettie 2014, 3). The U.S. began the exchange of students, artists, researchers, and scholars with Latin America in 1936. These exchanges had the aim to simultaneously counter Nazi ideas
and gain allies in the region. Educational and cultural exchanges became popular after the Second World War (WWII) because states wanted to eliminate cultural divisions, Nazi racism, and hostilities among nations and ethnic groups, which were promoted by the German Third Reich (Bettie 2014). The end of the Cold War forced Western policy-makers to redefine the conceptual features of their public diplomacy since the ideological component of exchanges in public diplomacy seemed to have disappeared with the collapse of the USSR. However, the September 11th 2001 terrorist strikes in the U.S. (hereafter “9/11”) once again brought home the importance of public diplomacy (Nye 2008; Gilboa 2008). The West, particularly the U.S., started using public diplomacy to counter terrorism, radicalism, and extremism (Gillespie 2002). That said, the U.S. has also begun to restrict its liberal visa policy for students, temporary workers, migrants, and refugees (Harris 2017).

Exchanges have a value for states as a political tool of foreign policy (Scott-Smith 2008). According to Lindsey (1989), “educational and cultural affairs are tools of foreign policy [for] the strategic interests of the nation” (433). One of the theories of the demise of the USSR and the end of Cold War, for example, is exposure to “Western” liberal norms. Some scholars as Atkinson (2010) and Richmond (2005) note the role of people’s exchanges that contributed to Gorbachev’s policies of perestroika (“restructuring”) and glasnost (“openness”). If looking back to Cold War era, the Soviet Union, in response to Western cultural and educational exchanges, founded the Patrice Lumumba University in 1960 (known today as the “People’s Friendship University of Russia”), where young people mostly from Africa received free “education paid for by the Soviet government, with the aim: to ‘prepare cadres’ sympathetic to the Soviet Union” (Dougherty 2013, 33).
Li (2006) observes that starting in the 1970s when China’s close ties with the Soviet Union had crumbled; many Chinese started choosing the U.S. for higher education. According to his research, the generation of Chinese returnees from the U.S. has had a certain political and liberalizing impact on China. “A large number of the returnees,” writes Li, “feel that a democratic China is absolutely necessary for its modernization” (13). Li claims that it is still difficult for Western ideas to flourish in China because Western-educated intellectuals do not have influential positions to influence citizens. Returnees’ political role is limited with administrative and consultation positions, but they nonetheless serve as carriers of liberal political values in an indirect and gradual way. Atkinson (2010) observes the effect of the U.S.-hosted civilian and military exchange programmes on the authoritarian states and claims that exchange students after returning home apply their experience in transforming political institutions. She concludes that military exchange programmes positively influence and discourage authoritarian government’s incentives “to torture, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment, and disappearance” (9)—even more effective than civilian ones. Alumni of civilian exchange programmes tend to affect the basic human rights of their country, as well, such as in the areas of freedom of speech, religion, and political participation.

When the Soviet Union fell apart, Kyrgyzstan was forced to change its domestic and foreign policies. It was a time when the country had to decide on and define its own identity, to look for political alternatives aside from the vanished Soviet communist system, and to craft new institutions (Demir and Balci 2000). Western countries, in turn, particularly the U.S., were trying to fill the power vacuum in the post-Soviet space by promoting and inserting pro-Western ideas favoring a liberal international order. Central Asian countries had formally proclaimed
themselves as democracies and made efforts, at least nominally, to correspond to Western ideas of liberalism such as freedom and equality, and interdependence by means of free trade and involvement with international institutions. Central Asians have also been eager to participate in educational and cultural programmes as such programmes are attractive on ideational and material levels. For example, in 2015, 212 tertiary-level students from Kyrgyzstan studied in the U.S. (UNESCO 2018), while according to data from the Kyrgyz Government, in 2017, around 20,000 Kyrgyz labor migrants were working in the U.S. and Europe (GoK 2018).

At the same time, Kyrgyzstan has always remained under Russian influence. The common historical background has left strong cultural, political and economic ties with Russia. A number of Russian television channels broadcast in Kyrgyzstan and of the more than 700,000 Kyrgyz citizen labor migrants abroad, 90%, or around 640,000 were in Russia in 2017 (GoK 2018). Russia remains the first destination for Kyrgyz tertiary-level students, as well, with half or 5,700 out of 11,357 Kyrgyz students studying abroad in 2016 having been in Russia (UNESCO 2018).

Nowadays, Kyrgyzstanis have opportunities to apply for a wide range of Western as well as Russian educational programmes, many providing scholarships and fellowships that cover nearly all of one’s expenses. Aside from these educational programmes, there are “Work and Travel” programmes to the U.S. These programmes, as opposed to educational scholarships, are self-sponsored, i.e. the traveler pays her or his own expenses while being allowed to earn money through employment when abroad. Russian educational scholarships mostly recruit through the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan. For Kyrgyzstani participants, these programmes are a chance to receive education and experience in the U.S. or Russia along with becoming acquainted with a different
country, and culture, including possibly learning a new language. The programmes also serve as forms of public diplomacy for the host countries.

**Research question**

Regardless of the motives behind educational exchange and or work visa programmes—humanitarian, political, or other—such programmes likely affect the participants’ worldviews, in addition to the opinions of the host country. This Thesis, thus, focuses on the following main question: *To what extent does the experience of foreign exchange programmes in the U.S. vs. similar programmes in Russia affect the worldviews of participating Kyrgyz citizens?* The fact that the West, as opposed to Russia, considers itself as the main source and promoter of liberal values leads to the following sub-questions of this Thesis: *How does the experience of studying or working abroad affect the participant’s social and political views vis-à-vis liberal norms (such as human rights, specially women’s rights, LGBT rights,¹ and ethnic pluralism)? How does the experience of studying or working in the U.S. vs. Russia affect the political attitudes of participants on their affinity towards the U.S. and Russia? What happens to Kyrgyz citizens’ sentiments on nationalism as a consequence of living abroad?*

**Theoretical framework**

This research will be framed in terms of soft power concept, which is about the ability to fulfill and accomplish certain goals through “attraction” or “co-option” (Nye 2004, 7). The attractiveness can be caused by the host state’s culture, political values, and foreign policy. If the policies that a particular country follows seem to other foreign people as “legitimate and [laden with] moral authority,” the soft power of the state is effective (quoted in Lin and Hongtao 2017). However, as Nye notes, soft power is

¹ LGBT refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.
largely “outside of the control of governments,” and it all depends on context and “acceptance by the receiving audiences” (Nye 2004, 99). Thus, it comes out that it is hard to wield soft power, since, despite their strength, soft power resources can be “slower [and] more diffuse” than other resources wielded by the state (100).

In the framework of the soft power concept, it is possible to observe how sojourners’ worldviews change as a consequence of being affected by soft power resources of Russia and the U.S. during cross-cultural work or study experiences. Nye (2004) argues about different contexts, receivers and their level of acceptance. This Thesis, in turn, analyzes the level of acceptance of American and Russian soft power by Kyrgyzstani receivers (or participants) under the differing contexts of being in the U.S. vs. Russia through educational exchanges and scholarships vs. work-visa stays. The assumption is that the worldviews of each group may differ given the context (country and type of exchange programme), the receivers themselves (age, gender, educational level, etc.), and their level of acceptance of the host country’s soft power.

Hypotheses

This Thesis attempts to test the following hypotheses:

H1: Exposure of Kyrgyz citizens to both the U.S. and Russia increases their liberal socio-political worldviews (by way of opinions and attitudes on women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic pluralism).

H2: The level of liberal socio-political worldviews is higher for those Kyrgyz citizens who participated in stays in the U.S. as opposed to Russia.

H3: The level of liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens is higher for those who participated in sponsored educational programmes in the U.S. or Russia as opposed to those who were on self-financed work programmes.

H4: The level of pro-American and pro-Russian attitudes, respectively, are not significantly different among those who participated in sponsored educational programmes of the said states as opposed to those who were on self-financed work programmes.
Methodology

This Thesis employs the research method of quasi-experimental design. A quasi-experimental research design requires observations, which can be measured, among other things, through discussions in focus groups (FGs). The advantage of the experimental method is that it provides procedures for controlling or “manipulating one of the variables under carefully controlled conditions,” a procedure which a quasi-experimental design attempts to partially emulate (Gray 2007, 265). Thus, under a purely experimental design, subjects would ideally be randomly divided among those exposed to the independent variable (such as going abroad) and others not exposed to going abroad (i.e. kept as ‘control group’).

Under a quasi-experimental design, the manipulation of variables on randomly selected subjects is impossible, but a quasi-experiment is still possible (Bradley 2009). Following the quasi-experimental research design rules, this Thesis will use two broad experimental groups, which represent treatment with the independent variable of exposure to the U.S. or Russian educational or employment opportunities and one or more control groups with no such treatment or exposure. The “quasi-experimental groups” will be groups of students who are going to Russia and the U.S. to do their exchanges by way of study or work, and students who recently came back from their exchanges or studies and from self-financed work visa stay. The “control group” (the group with no manipulation of the independent variable) will also be randomly selected among individuals of similar age who have not been abroad or do not have the intention of going on work or educational programmes to the West and Russia in the near future. These groups will be selected to serve as the equivalent “pretest” and “posttest” to determine the impact of exposure to education or work abroad vs. a group that has never been abroad.
There are some limitations of experimental and quasi-experimental research. For instance, it is important to try to avoid the “Hawthorne effect,” aka “modeling effect,” when participants of research know that they are the subjects of the study and behave in an artificial and biased manner, i.e. they may act and respond in a way as they think the researcher wants them to do (Gray 2007, 271). The quasi-experimental model to be used for this Thesis will formulate 10 FGs (each made up of four to five individuals; see Table 1 in Chapter II for details).

**Research significance**

Cross-cultural exchanges can be highly appropriate instruments of public diplomacy because the environment along with education or work experience creates favorable conditions to insert, impose, and promote certain ideas, values and norms, and, among other things, make citizens of other citizens more loyal to the host-country (Chepurina 2014). Per Gilboa (2008), however, international mass media or cultural diplomacy has gained much more attention than international exchanges in their soft power value. This Thesis thus hopes to: **one**, fill this gap in public diplomacy by its particular focus and gathering of empirical data on the Central Asian country of Kyrgyzstan. **Second**, this research is unique for its choice of methodology, that of the quasi-experimental design, which is rarely used in Central Asia.

**Third**, this research is also important due to making an effort to reveal the connection between soft power or public diplomacy with educational exchange programmes. The study could potentially serve as a base and a starting point for further research in political economy or political psychology or conflict prevention studies, among others. **Fourth**, this research is significant in that Kyrgyzstan is a relatively young independent state and the study of the consequences of being a target state of Great Powers’ soft power can be of interest to academicians and politicians.
On the other hand (fifth), this research could tell about possible political trends in Kyrgyzstan via measurement of social and political mindsets of those exposed to the West and the Russian Federation. Though the participants may not necessarily be politicians or involved in partisan politics, they nonetheless may be able to influence their society through their newly acquired values and believes.

**Research limitations**

There are some possible limitations to this research. First is its geographical limitation, because it is concentrated on educational exchange programmes and self-financed work visa stays to the U.S. and Russia. The target state of foreign exposure is only Kyrgyzstan, which may not necessarily be a perfect representation of the rest of Central Asia. Second, this research mostly involves students and youth, aged between 16 and 30, and not younger or older individuals who could in one degree or another be affected by exposure to foreign stay or education, as well.

This research does not include in-depth analysis of preliminary or other factors influencing on social and political attitudes of participants since it is not the focus of study. However, after conducting FGs and analysis, it will be possible to reveal to a certain degree whether particular social and political ideas were ideationally adopted after participants’ exposure to soft power of the U.S. or Russia as a result of their educational or work stays abroad.
Chapter II

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

“Since the late 1980s, [focus groups] have affected even the political discussions that ultimately determine what kind of society we can have, not to mention the toothpaste we use, the soap operas we watch, the news media we consume, and the video games we play.” (Featherstone 2018)

This chapter addresses the quasi-experimental research method. It serves as a guideline to Chapter IV (Findings and Analysis). Along with describing the basics of quasi-experimental design, the chapter hopes to illustrate this rarely utilized method in Central Asia and elaborate the relevance of using a quasi-experiment to draw a causal relationship between the experience of cross-cultural exposure abroad and social and political attitudes of Kyrgyz citizens. The quasi-experimental research is aided by the technique of focus groups.

Quasi-experimentation

Overall, a quasi-experimental method is related to experimental research. Quasi-experimental research design has all the elements and features of true or classic experiment except random assignment of people to groups (Gray 2007; McNabb 2010; Greeno 2002). As in a true experimental research and quasi-experimentation, this Thesis first analyzes the relationship between two variables with the manipulation of one. There is a causal variable or independent variable, which in the case of this Thesis is an experience of cross-cultural exposure or going abroad by study or work. The independent variable is “an experimental stimulus” that could be present or absent (Babbie 2010, 232).
Then there is the dependent variable. It is, in this Thesis, the social and political attitudes of Kyrgyzstanis. As in a true or classic experiment, this study compares what happens to the dependent variable when the stimulus is present and what happens when it is absent. The research intends to test what happens to the social and political attitudes of Kyrgyz citizens when they are subjects of cross-cultural experience, and when they are not. The main essence of experimental research is an opportunity to manipulate and control the independent variable. Hence, this study manipulates the independent variable of going abroad, and investigates what can be labeled as the opinions, attitudes or values of groups of Kyrgyz citizens: Those who have been to Russia and the U.S., those who are going to these countries, and those who have never been abroad and do not plan to go abroad in the near future.

Second, following the requirements of the classic experimental research this quasi-experimentation has its “experimental” and “control” groups (Kellstedt and Whitten 2009). The participants are divided into treatment or experimental groups (who have been abroad and are going abroad) and control groups (who have never been abroad). In the experimental groups, the independent variable (going abroad) is “introduced and manipulated,” whereas in the control groups the independent variable is “neither introduced nor manipulated” (Gray 2007, 265). This quasi-experimental research has eight experimental FGs and two control FGs. See Table 1.

Thirdly, this research responds to experimental procedures of pretest and posttest. The effect of the independent variable (going abroad) is analyzed in terms of a dependent variable (social and political attitudes). The measurement of the dependent variable before introducing and manipulation of the independent variable is a pretest (Gray 2007; Babbie 2010). The measurement of the dependent variable among subjects after “they have been exposed to an independent variable” is a posttest.
Table 1: Groups of people studied in the quasi-experimental research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experimental groups</th>
<th>Control groups</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>United States</strong></td>
<td><strong>Russian Federation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sponsored educational stay</td>
<td>Sponsored educational stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Participants who are going</td>
<td>3. Participants who are going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participants who have come back</td>
<td>4. Participants who have come back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Participants who are going</td>
<td>7. Participants who are going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Participants who have come back</td>
<td>8. Participants who have come back</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-financed work visa stay</td>
<td>Self-financed work visa stay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Participants who have never been abroad and not planning to go</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Participants who have never been abroad and not planning to go</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

(Babbie 2010, 232). This study, thus, presents pretesting and posttesting where FGs #1, #3, #5, and #7 take the forms of the pretest, while FGs #2, #4, #6 and #8 function as the posttest. Participants of pretest groups are those who are just going to experience cross-cultural exposure, with the independent variable of “going abroad” not having been introduced yet. Participants of posttest groups are those who have come back from stays abroad, thus having already been exposed to the independent variable (going abroad).

The quasi-experimental design differs from classic or true experiments by the lack of fully random sampling or random assignment and the lack of “control exposure to the independent variable or the conditions under which it occurs” (Manheim 2008, 109). Greeno (2002) describes that in quasi-experimental designs “groups are often referred to as “comparison” groups, to contrast them with “control” groups” (734). This research lacks a fully random assignment to experimental groups and random sampling because it does not randomly assign to one of the possible values of the independent variable. In data collection, I will look for particular participants who fit the requirement of going abroad or being back from “abroad” (i.e. Russia or the U.S.), specifically.
Another requirement is that the quasi-experiment is maintained among those who are going to or have come back from Russia and the U.S. by sponsored educational programmes and self-financed work visa stays. When it comes to control groups, these groups include those who have never been abroad. The quasi-experimental design also does not quite follow random sampling because the subjects are not sampled randomly but are separated within the above-mentioned requirements to subjects of experimental and control groups.

Quasi-experimental designs have several benefits as well as pitfalls. Quasi-experimentation is relevant when there are changes in the independent variable that naturally take place rather than manipulated (Grant and Wall 2009). It provides a good stance for both internal validity and external validity. “Internal validity” is “the ways in which the conduct or process of experimentation itself may affect the results obtained” (Gray 2007, 268). In turn, “external validity” is defined as “difficulties in generalizing the findings of experimental research” (268). Laboratory and true experiments are criticized for artificial settings. In this regard, one of the benefits of this quasi-experimentation is that it does not interrupt, and reflects “real life” (world) as it occurs. This study intends to study “the impact of macroscopic variable, [which] are impossible to control and manipulate” when merely observing the real world (Grant and Wall 2009, 659). The cross-cultural experience of Kyrgyz citizens is the macroscopic (or independent) variable, and quasi-experimental method helps to identify causal inferences by testing the effects of the macroscopic variable on the dependent variable (social and political attitudes).

The quasi-experimental design has its own disadvantages, however. Even though it illustrates more external validity than laboratory experiments by not constructing artificial situations, it lacks random assignment and random sampling. It
is thus difficult to be sure (more so than a true experimental design) that the findings of the quasi-experiment apply not only to participants but also to the population in general (Kellstedt and Whitten 2009).

**Focus groups**

A focus group is “a small collection of individuals brought together … for discussion of some issue, idea, product and program” (quoted in Gray 2007, 2007). FGs give an opportunity to discuss in-depth some issues or ideas in order to know how people think about the topic; in other words, FGs are aimed to explore people’s opinion and belief on a particular topic (Manheim 2008, Krueger and Casey 2015). FGs are conducted among people who possess certain characteristics, and are means for generating largely qualitative data. FG method enables to understand the topic, contribute to getting more sufficient “insights into what people actually think” and it assists in learning “group dynamics” (Manheim 2008, 357).

This study utilizes the use of FG data collection methodology to reveal how the cross-cultural experience influences people’s values and beliefs, specifically social and political attitudes. FGs (N=10) are maintained among all eight groups of the experimental groups of this research and two control groups. In summary, the research for this Thesis intends to conduct 10 FG sessions with the aim of discovering to what extent the experience of foreign exchange programmes in the U.S. and Russia affect the worldviews or attitudes of Kyrgyz citizens.

The attitudes of pretest groups (who are going abroad) will be compared to the attitudes of participants of posttest groups (who have come back), along with exploring differences and similarities in opinions of participants who have been to Russia vs. the U.S., and of those who have never been exposed to the cross-cultural experience. Attitudes of Kyrgyzstanis are explored via the focus group discussions on
women’s rights, rights of ethnic minorities, rights of LGBT, and opinions about Russia and the U.S. Questions on nationalism, time-permitting, will also be asked.

According to Manheim (2008), the FG method is considered as one of the most efficient in learning group dynamics. Understanding which dimensions influence group members helps to disclose some social phenomena. However, one of the drawbacks of focus groups are that the small number of people may not be necessarily representative of the larger population for which inferences are to be made. It is thus difficult to generalize the findings to the whole population or any larger one with full precision and confidence. It is possible to cope with this disadvantage of the focus group method by carrying out other methods of data collection and analysis or a far larger number of FGs. Among other things, FGs are used as a baseline for following survey research (Krueger and Casey 2015).

Overall, a quasi-experimental methodology allows combining causal research with comparative research. If the main purpose of an experimental study is to determine “the causes or causes of change in a variable,” the comparative study’s purpose in this Thesis is to test for the effects of so-called “soft power” of Russia vs. the U.S. on the worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens. Cross-national research based on causal research with a quasi-experimental study should help to reveal whether going abroad to a particular country (U.S. vs. Russia) with specific purposes (studying or working) influences the attitudes and views of subjects (Kyrgyz citizens). Like many other techniques of data collection, FG technique may not be a full proof means for generalizations, but FGs nonetheless give ground for a qualitative approach to research.
Chapter III

LITERATURE REVIEW

“They came, they saw, they were conquered, and the USSR would never again be the same”—Yale Richmond on the U.S. exchange programmes with the USSR (2005, 356)

“There is a move to re-Sovietise the region. It’s not going to be called that. It’s going to be called ... Eurasian Union and all of that. But let’s make no mistake about it. We know what the goal is and we are trying to figure out effective ways to slow down or prevent it.” —U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, 7 December 2012 (Clover 2012)

“Exporting education and culture will help promote Russian goods, services, and ideas; [while] guns and imposing political regimes will not.” —Russian President Vladimir Putin (Chepurina 2014, 61)

This chapter explores the studies on public diplomacy and soft power. Mainly it seeks to find out the role given to educational exchange programmes and cross-national experiences of citizens in public diplomacy and soft power of the U.S. and the Russian Federation. It also aims to illustrate the gap of the studies related to the effect of international educational and other exchange programmes on people’s values and attitudes. It contains three main sections of: American public diplomacy and soft power, Russian public diplomacy and soft power, and Educational exchange programmes for Kyrgyz citizens.

American public diplomacy and soft power

The review of American public diplomacy and soft power is complicated for several reasons. The U.S. is the country that invented the concepts of both “public
diplomacy” and “soft power,” which require the careful analysis of the background of such developments and reasons for why these concepts were needed to begin with, and some of the main pitfalls of these concepts. Secondly, scientific studies of the role of international programmes as public diplomacy are not many, and most cover the Cold War, rather than the post-Cold War era. Thirdly, the effects of American educational exchange programmes on social and political attitudes of people are largely under-studied.

Though Edmund Gullion introduced the term “public diplomacy” in 1965 (Kennedy and Lucas 2005, 310), the term too on a second life by start of the American-led so-called “Global war on terror,” in the post-9/11 era and continues to this day. Public diplomacy was invented to win the contest for “hearts and minds” against the Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War when the U.S. had assumed to have won, it also reduced its efforts of in the contest for “hearts and minds.” Later, the term public diplomacy resumed its significance after the terror attacks of 9/11 as Americans asked themselves the question “Why do they hate us?” Moreover, the term public diplomacy was needed when various polls revealed unprecedented anti-Americanism around the world. Since that time, public diplomacy as a concept has whetted the appetite of many researchers (Cowan and Cull 2008).

The problem is, however, that there is virtually no theory and a clear definition of public diplomacy. The definition of public diplomacy has been changing over time and space or country. Cowan and Cull (2008) define public diplomacy as “an international actor’s attempt to advance the ends of policy by engaging with foreign publics” (6), while Gregory (2008) defines it as “ways and means by which states, associations of states, and non-state actors understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to
advance their interests and values” (276). Gilboa (2008), in turn, gives the understanding of public diplomacy as a “direct communication with foreign people, with the aim of affecting their thinking, and ultimately that of their government” (57). And Paul Sharp describes public diplomacy as “the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented” (quoted in Hukil 2015, 5).

All the above definitions imply communication with overseas target groups, but as Melissen (2005) notes, first, public diplomacy is not uniquely a state activity or it is not just the interaction between governmental officials, as the main difference is that citizens are also involved in it. Furthermore, various international actors are involved in this communication with governments along with citizens. For instance, the UN stands for supranational public diplomacy, whereas different non-governmental organizations (NGOs) build communication and relationships with various foreign publics. And public diplomacy is not simply a one-way communication and information flow, but it also reflects those of a foreign audience. Hence, public diplomacy is the building of dialogue with a foreign audience with the purpose of pursuing certain objectives that are strategically important for the foreign policy of a state. According to Jan Melissen (2005), public diplomacy is able to realize a wide variety of objectives, such as in the field of political dialogue, trade, and foreign investment, the establishment of links with civil society groups beyond the opinion gatekeepers, but also has ‘hard power’ goals such as alliance management, conflict prevention or military intervention. (14)

All these definitions clearly identify the purpose of public diplomacy and differentiate it from traditional diplomacy. However, these descriptions lack identification of practices that assist public diplomacy to reach its goals.
According to Pamela Hyde Smith (2007), public diplomacy tries to pursue its objectives “through a variety of information, culture, education, and advocacy programmes” (117). Nicholas J. Cull (2008) divides practices of public diplomacy into five elements of: listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting. “Listening” includes collecting and collecting data on the opinions of overseas opinions. Conducting different polls could be referred to listening, which can help evaluate the appeal of foreign policies and the effectiveness of public diplomacy. “Advocacy” is “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by undertaking an international communication activity to actively promote a particular policy or idea ... in the minds of a foreign public” (32). Advocacy activities can, inter alia, include embassy press releases. “Cultural diplomacy,” in turn, is an actor’s measures to spread its cultural achievements, and resources. It could be done, among other things, via exhibitions, concerts, or festivals. And “exchange diplomacy” is “an actor’s attempt to manage the international environment by sending its citizens overseas and reciprocally accepting citizens from overseas for a period of study and acculturation” (33), while ”international news broadcasting” is using mass media to defend a state’s interests and values.

What is the role of “soft power” in the above-mentioned? As told, it was Nye (1991) who coined the concept, but as with public diplomacy, soft power also became largely known and scrutinized after 9/11. In the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2003 American invasion of Iraq, Nye criticized U.S. President George W. Bush’s administration, because of its overreliance on hard power, and denying the existence or importance of American soft power. Per Nye, the unfavorable image of America prevails because the U.S. has forgotten about its soft power (Nye 2004a; Nye 2004b).
Nye (2004a) defines soft power as “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through enticement and attraction rather than coercion or payments” (5). A nation’s culture, political values, and foreign policy can cause repulsion, indifference or attraction and persuasion. Soft power comes within and overlaps with the dimensions of public diplomacy. Scholars such as Melissen (2005), Goldsmith and Horiuchi (2012), Cull (2008), Gregory (2008), and Lagon (2011) who study American public diplomacy, soft power, and U.S. foreign policy do not expand on the differences or relationship of public diplomacy and soft power; Nye (2008) does, however. He holds the view that soft power is an outcome of activities of public diplomacy as expressed in people’s behavior or attitude to a certain country. This outcome occurs due to the resources that produce soft power. These resources arise from the values a country “expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others.” Public diplomacy, in turn, attempts to draw attention to these resources through “broadcasting, subsidizing cultural exports, arranging exchanges” (95). Thus, public diplomacy represents an instrument of producing soft power. In other words, public diplomacy transforms resources into action, and in the process produces soft power (Gilboa 2008).

Scholars like Nye (2004, 2008), Melissen (2005), Gilboa (2008), and Batora (2006) have proposed that public diplomacy means yielding soft power. But Nye (2004, 2008) also argues that public diplomacy is not, as Hukil (2015) posits, an “inherent manifestation of soft power.” Public diplomacy sometimes can discourage the desired outcome of attraction because when “foreign policies are unsound and narrowly self-serving,” it prohibits soft power. As Nye (2008) tells it: “Even the best advertising cannot sell an unpopular product” (103).
Studies of American public diplomacy

Here, I examine the literature on American public diplomacy or soft power and exchange or mobility programmes within the abovementioned concepts. As was found, the literature mostly relates to the time of the Cold War and the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and the GWoT. Nearly all studies on American public diplomacy during the Cold War paint a rosy picture of a successful U.S. foreign policy for the era. What many studies also have in common are criticisms of U.S. foreign policy in the post-9/11 era under President Bush, with nearly all defining the 2000s as an era of failure of American public diplomacy and a time of rising anti-Americanism.

According to Nye (2004a), the U.S. had won the Cold War because it used soft-power resources, which included exchange programmes, popular American culture, domestic values such as democracy and human rights, and an overall foreign policy that seemed to others as legitimate. The U.S. combined soft power with hard power that represented the economic modernity of the U.S. The aftermath of 9/11, however, left the U.S. with issues both of rising anti-Americanism globally and subsequent supposed vulnerability in the face of international terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The Iraq war turned U.S. foreign policy hostile and unfavorable to many countries in the world. Nye claims this happened because of the U.S.’s focus on pursuing all its interests via hard—as opposed to soft—power. It is efficient to have a balance between soft and hard power, but also not missing the core national interests of the U.S. For Nye, if the U.S. wants other countries to perceive its policies as legitimate it should enhance its soft power. He suggests that one of the means to enhance soft power is exchange programmes.

Smith (2007) highlights that the U.S. accrued soft power during the 20th century because “it adhered to its founding democratic ideals; demonstrated its values
through such programmes as the Marshall Plan; and propagated its appealing culture and lifestyle, both commercially and through government-sponsored programmes and media such as the [state-funded] Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty” (117). Smith claims that the resisting of negative attitudes toward the U.S. rose after the U.S. presidential elections in 2000 and the Iraq invasion starting in 2003. Smith further notes that anti-Americanism is becoming a national security threat for the U.S. and that is why America has to match its policies more consistent with its values and ideals as “fairness, the rule of law, human rights, opportunity and humility” (120). The U.S. Government has to fight anti-Americanism, claims Smith, with the energy and enthusiasm as it did during the Cold War with the genuine objective of winning hearts and minds. As such, a larger budget should be allocated to exchange programmes, language programmes, and cultural events.

It is worth noting that a large number of scholars who investigate American public diplomacy come to the conclusion that public diplomacy, i.e. communication with a foreign audience and enhancing positive image abroad, is correlated with political values promoted by the U.S. and her foreign policy. For instance, Nye (2004) mentions that if the U.S. prefers effective soft power, then its foreign policy and domestic values all together should go in line. Problems arise for soft power when the U.S. does not live up to its own standards; “in short, America’s success will depend upon ... [it] developing a deeper understanding [of] the role of soft power and developing a better balance of hard and soft power in ... [its] foreign policy,” writes Nye (2004b, 270).

The literature on public diplomacy and exchange programmes in one way or another touches upon the effectiveness of exchange programmes in enhancing the positive image and pursuing the national interests of America. First, it is important to
review how scholars relate exchange programmes to public diplomacy. The sequent literature review reveals that exchange programmes are perceived as one of the key elements to “sell the story” of America.

_U.S. Exchange programmes and public diplomacy_

Cultural exchanges became an integral part of American diplomatic relations in the 20th century. Before the existence of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA), in 1938 the Interdepartmental Committee for Scientific Cooperation and the Division of Cultural Cooperation were created in the U.S. State Department, developing official educational and cultural exchanges with other nations. In 1952, the USIA was established, which had a “clear” mandate to maintain communication and spread of information abroad. Cultural and educational exchanges were part of cultural diplomacy until the 1970s, before the term public diplomacy was institutionalized (Lindsay 1989). Integration of education and culture with public diplomacy cannot be avoided, as public diplomacy “promote[s] mutual understanding through autonomous educational and cultural contacts” (428).

The above is thought to be true since nations perceive each other through knowledge, information, and human contact. With the establishment of the USIA, the U.S. began to communicate with other states through educational and exchange programmes. Educational and cultural exchanges cannot escape from being in the arms of diplomatic affairs. They deal with communicating with foreigners via academia and cultural events. From the history of educational and exchange programmes, it is evident that they have always been under the rule of diplomatic institutions. Scott-Smith (2008) points out that the U.S. State Department has always had an outlook on the purpose of exchanges in nurturing “favorable public opinion abroad by securing the acquiescence of influential local individuals” (175).
A large amount of literature on American public diplomacy is dedicated to the strategic importance of exchange programmes not only in promoting the positive image of the U.S. but also in pursuing the goals of U.S. foreign policy. Smith (2007) and Nye (2004) argue, however, that since the start of the 2003 Iraq invasion by the U.S., America’s favorable image has been continuously falling. The world “stopped buying the American narrative,” writes Smith, i.e. the popularity and trust in the U.S. has diminished. These and other authors blame the U.S. Government in primarily relying on hard power, which is military and economic inducements, but also give credit to the individual experience of citizens in a foreign country, as these individuals are able to shape others’ opinions about the U.S., given that “State Department studies show that participants in U.S. government-funded exchange programmes acquire much ... positive views of the U.S. [primarily] from their firsthand experiences” (Smith 2007, 117).

Many claim that the U.S. made a mistake when it eliminated the USIA, an agency that was responsible for public diplomacy. When victory in the Cold War came, the U.S. assumed that it was not in need of the USIA any longer. Many also advocate an increase in funding for educational and cultural exchange programmes with a focus on Muslim countries, given the increased anti-American sentiments prevalent in the Middle East. Gilboa (2008) views that “communication, education, and persuasion have become major techniques” of maintaining foreign relations as opposed to military force (60). Nye (2008) emphasizes on the effectiveness of exchanges and the need for the U.S. to understand better “what is going in the minds of others and what values [Americans] share [with others]” (103). Scott-Smith (2008), in turn, perceives that exchanges are important in “shaping basic attitudes of key future leaders towards the U.S.” because these individuals may reconsider their
identity and their interests and he sees the best chance to succeed in this aim in exchanges (186).

All the above-mentioned literature provides a good basis for further research on exchange programmes within the broad context of public diplomacy and soft power. They indicate the importance and significance of exchanges in promoting American values and interests, and repeatedly mention as the key reason for the end of the Cold War being the successful American public diplomacy. Despite the fact that one of the tools that made American public diplomacy successful having been exchange programmes, the literature lacks studies on the feedback on American exchange programmes and soft power. The literature also reveals that during the Cold War, there had been an emphasis on the role of exchanges in bringing down regimes hostile to the U.S. and other Western powers, most notably the Soviet Union and its satellites. For instance, Yale Richmond’s (2005) analysis of Cold War exchanges between the U.S. and USSR seems to support the hypothesis that exchanges have a serious impact on attitudes of individuals.

The review of literature on U.S. educational exchange programmes supports the assumption that international contacts promote dialogue and change attitudes of private citizens involved in this interpersonal communication. Moreover, the literature offers some support that exchange programmes serve certain political ends and make their participants open to American values as human rights and democracy. The hypothesis provided by reviewed literature is that exchange programmes are capable of changing identities and interests, thus values and beliefs of participants, and make them positive towards the U.S. However, it is crucial to observe to what extent exchange programmes affect the values and beliefs of the participants, and if they affect them at all. Exchange programmes are thought to tend to be the tool of public
diplomacy, and thus it is crucial to test this hypothesis as to whether the participants of exchange programmes become more loyal to the host countries or not.

Yale Richmond (2005) provides an explanation for the end of the Cold War and collapse of communism. He claims they happened due to contacts with Soviet citizens, in particular exchanges with the West, which started with the death of Stalin and lasted for 35 years. He argues that the interests and identities 50,000 Soviets who visited the West under various exchange programmes were changed. Richmond writes “those exchanges changed the Soviet Union and prepared the way for Gorbachev’s glasnost, perestroika, and the end of the Cold War” (356). He refers to some Soviet officials who participated in exchanges with the U.S., such as Aleksandr Yakovlev, known as the godfather of Gorbachev’s glasnost, given that Yakovlev was Gorbachev’s liaison with intellectuals and Gorbachev’s first constituency. Yakovlev, himself, had been an exchange student to Columbia University. However, Richmond’s explanation is not set in stone, because history knows failures of exchange programmes, as well. An example of failure is that of the Muslim Brotherhood’s founder Sayed Qutb who had spent the whole 1948 in Colorado as an exchange visitor studying in the U.S. Upon his return to Egypt, Qutb founded the ultra-conservative Muslim Brotherhood with a major message against the West and societal corruption. As Cull (2008) notes, “the [exchange] experience amplified [unsympathetic views about the U.S.]” and ironically may have “motivated ... [Qutb] to greater militancy” (46).

Carol Atkinson (2010) argues on the impossibility to build effective democratic institutions in any state, while citizens themselves are not aware of well-functioning and democratic institutions. She focuses on the effect of the U.S.-hosted civilian and military exchange programmes in authoritarian states, because, she says,
exchange students after returning home often apply their American experience in transforming political institutions of their own country. She is positive about military exchange programmes, which she argues, have a potential to prevent “torture, extrajudicial killings, political imprisonment, and disappearance,” and could be more effective than civilian programmes (9). Civilian exchange programmes, in turn, improve basic human rights as freedom of speech, religion, and political participation. Nevertheless, explains Atkinson, exchange programmes condition socialization depending on the depth and extent of social contacts. In addition, an important condition is sharing the common identity. If exchange students or militants were to share a common identity with those who are in host country, it affects their attitude enormously. Atkinson’s study is concentrated on changes that exchange students have brought to their states of origin. It does not, however, explain in detail and sufficiently how these participants of exchange programmes themselves have changed. It takes for granted that all exchange students and militants have changed their values.

Calvert Jones (2015) seeks to test the liberal hypothesis that “greater ... [international] contact can be a powerful force for good.” Specifically, Jones tends to answer whether students of exchange programmes quell hyper-nationalism and ward of international conflict. Jones conducted experimental research with over 500 students surveyed “on their feelings of international community, perceptions of foreign threat, and levels of nationalism and patriotism.” Jones’ first hypothesis that cross-border contact enhances a sense of shared international community was rejected since students returning from study abroad felt fewer values in common, but they told that they had different understandings of key concepts from the people of the host country. His second hypothesis that international contacts “mitigate perceptions of fire threat and foster expectations of peaceful change and cooperation” was supported
because returned students from abroad rated their host countries as less threatening than did students about to leave. Jones’ third hypothesis, the “clash of civilization,” posits that international contacts do not promote a sense of shared international community, but promote nationalism, instead.

Jones tested his hypotheses through a survey of participants of international programmes. Students who returned from the host countries were more proud of American literature, culture, accomplishments, political influence. However, they did not display a heightened belief in American superiority. Thus, according to Jones’ research, international contacts do not promote nationalism in chauvinistic form, but lead to “enlightened nationalism.” This research does not prove that exchange programmes promote a strong sense of shared international community, a “we-feeling,” but it promotes a less threatening and hostile views of “others.”

Douglas Blum (2016) studied cultural globalization through the returned young migrants of Kazakhstan who had gone to the U.S. He explores “how and why cultural change, mixing, and/or reproduction occur” (4). The main question of Blum is: What kind of “cultural remittances” do different individuals bring back to Kazakhstan, and how are these cultural remittances received? He identifies cultural aspects that were borrowed from American ideas and behavior as being issues of “progress,” which is the transformation of practical skills as well as the practice of volunteer work; the issue of rationality, which implies practices of self-sufficiency and being nice to people; the topic of propriety: dressing casually, sitting improperly, engaging in personal openness, and postponing marriages; and lastly, a propensity towards gender equality. Blum comes up with a new synthesis of Bourdieu and Asher’s theories to explain the social process of cultural and identity change. He makes a synthesis of these two theories, in a way that Bourdieu is right in claiming
that there are severe limitations in how people perceive the world, themselves, and others constructed by social positions and cultural orientations. At the same time, Asher’s point is important in the sense that he develops different modes of reflexivity (adopting or rejecting some cultural values). Blum emphasizes here the crucial role of reflexivity in triggering cultural changes while remaining aware that certain aspects of the social and cultural contexts in Kazakhstani society can act as non-negotiable constraints in the legitimization of new practices. Blum studies how these newly learned practices are received and used in practice in Kazakhstan.

**Russian public diplomacy and soft power**

This section reviews how the Russian Government defines public diplomacy and soft power, what tools and means Russia uses in its public diplomacy activities, what kinds of anti-American sentiments it pursues, and what place do the post-Soviet states have in Russian public diplomacy. Based on available sources on Russian public diplomacy and soft power, this section also aims to determine features and specific characteristics of Russian public diplomacy and soft power that differ from their American counterparts. Russia (and formerly the core of the USSR) and the U.S. have historically for decades been counterparts to each other. In light of these factors, it is important to review Russian official documents to find out how Russia defines these terms.

Even though Russia started practicing public diplomacy activities, using different tools of diplomacy long before, it officially defined the term public diplomacy only in 2008 (Sukhova 2015). Public diplomacy, claims the Government of the Russian Federation (GRF), helps the country to seek its objective perception in the world, develop its own effective means of information influence on public opinion abroad, strengthen the role of the Russian mass media in the international information...
environment providing them with essential state support, as well as actively participating in international information cooperation, and take necessary measures to repel information threats to its sovereignty and security. (GRF 2008)

The indication of the purpose of public diplomacy characterizes “the heavy reliance on informational approach as well as the prioritization of the government’s role in the conduct and formulation of public diplomacy” (Osipova 2012, 21). However, the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept paper of the Russian Federation does not indicate or define public diplomacy as such, but perceives it as an additional method to develop international cultural and humanitarian cooperation as a means to build up dialogue among civilizations, achieve consensus and ensure understanding among peoples with a particular emphasis on inter-religious dialogue. (GRF 2016)

The Russian Government’s official document that delivers on the term “soft power” is “Basic Directions of the Policy of the Russian Federation in International Cultural and Humanitarian Cooperation” and issued in 2010 (Sukhova 2015, 64). The document also states cultural diplomacy is an important soft power tool, which aims to influence foreign opinion and promote the favorable image of Russia using specific forms and methods of influence (GRF 2010). Only in 2013 was “soft power” mentioned and deliberated in Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept paper. It defines soft power “as a comprehensive toolkit for achieving foreign policy objectives building on civil society potential, information, cultural and other methods and technologies alternative to traditional diplomacy” (GRF 2013). Moreover, the same document mentions that Western adversaries destructively use soft power and human rights to exert political pressure on sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, destabilize their political situation, manipulate public opinion, including under the pretext of financing cultural and human rights projects abroad. (GRF 2013)
It is observable that the Russian Government perceives its own soft power as a tool to enhance and improve the image of Russia, but on the other hand, it also perceives the soft power of others as a threat to its national security and sovereignty. When it comes to the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, it simply defines soft power as an integral part of efforts to achieve foreign policy objectives… the tools offered by civil society, as well as various methods and technologies—from information and communication to humanitarian and other types. (GRF 2016).

**Tools of Russian soft power**

The Russian Federation is not the exception as it seeks to improve its image abroad by promoting its culture, language, and history. Russia tries to promote an understanding of Russian values with its interlocutors. As mentioned, Russia started its active engagement in public diplomacy as late as the 2000s. Since then, Russia has been developing public diplomacy mechanisms and tools to accumulate its soft power.

One of the important and primer public diplomacy assets is the global news network RT (formerly “Russia Today”), launched in 2005 (RT 2018). According to Dale (2012), the Russian government launched RT with the clear objective to improve Russia’s image around the world. As Feklyunina (2016) says, RT was established as a coincidence of the Color Revolutions, when Russia changed its policy in favor of an anti-American discourse. RT has round-the-clock news channels in English, Arabic, Spanish and Russian available in more than 100 countries in five continents. As reported by its official website, RT covers stories overlooked by the mainstream media, provides alternative perspectives on current affairs, and acquaints international audiences with a Russian viewpoint on major global events. (RT 2018)

RT is financed from the budget of the Russian Federation. Many scholars criticize and are skeptical of RT’s objectives. Dale (2012) states that RT pursues to
“reach U.S. and global audience with an anti-American agenda-driven news and commentary,” thus, to damage America’s image. Osipova’s (2012) point on RT is the same, as she notes that “its rhetoric is often strongly anti-American/Western, and clearly demonstrates an attempt on behalf of Moscow to stand up to ‘Western Media Hegemony’” (27). Critics of RT claims that it is a platform of conspiracy theories in broadcasting news and programmes. Conspiracy theories legitimize Russia’s domestic and foreign policies, which have an anti-American message with intend to “delegitimize” the American Government (Yablokov 2015).

Rossotrudnichestvo (“Russian Cooperation Agency,” aka the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation) was established in 2008 by President Medvedev. Rossotrudnichestvo is represented in 80 countries. In accordance to its official website, the activities of the agency aims “at the implementation of the state policy of international humanitarian cooperation, [and] promotion abroad of an objective image of Russia” (Rossotrudnichestvo 2018). It is worth noting that the priority of Rossotrudnichestvo is cooperation with the state-members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Rossotrudnichestvo actively promotes the Russian language, Russian education services, and seeks to establish close links with Russian minorities (“compatriots”) abroad. The activities of Rossotrudnichestvo are seen as a tool for Russia’s influence with the CIS region (Sukhova 2015). Rossotrudnichestvo aims to build a relationship with the target foreign audience “through cultural and educational exchanges or humanitarian assistance” (Simons 2014, 449).

Ruskiy Mir (“Russian World”) was established by President Putin in 2007 with the purpose of “promoting the Russian language, Russia’s national heritage and a
significant aspect of Russian and [Russian] world culture, and supporting Russian language teaching programmes abroad” (Russkiy Mir 2018). Russkiy Mir was launched with the development of the phenomenon of “Russian world” and promotes a collective identity in the post-Soviet space (Fekyulina 2016). Russian world identity refers to the common cultural and historical ties with the post-Soviet states, including based on markers of the Russian language, Russian culture and history that has constructed a Russocentric community. Official documents, such as the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept paper, note that both Russkiy Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo are responsible for carrying out initiatives to promote Russian language and culture. Russkiy Mir is the joint project of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Science of Russia. Aside from promoting the Russian language and culture, Russkiy Mir cooperates with Russian diasporas and the Russian Orthodox Church (Sukhova 2015).

In line with Nye’s (2004a) point that soft power of any state is driven by three resources of culture, values, and policies, Russia claims its civilization uniqueness through cultural and value related narratives that the Russkiy Mir and Russian Orthodox Church advance. According to Dale (2012), the Russian Orthodox Church plays a crucial role in accumulating influence with the Russian Diaspora, and not only on religious issues. Church leaders appeal to Russian emigrants and ethnic Russian Diaspora to “act more Russian while living abroad and discouraging them from adopting the cultural mores, languages, and political beliefs of their host countries.” It is thus natural that the Orthodox Church’s Patriarch Metropolitan Kirill is closely tied to President Putin (Dougherty 2013). In 2006, for example, Patriarch Kirill had stated that Russians all over the world “should oppose Western civilization in its assertion of the universality of the Western tradition” (Kudors 2010, 2-3).
The review of the major Russian soft power and public diplomacy instruments and assets reveal that, as with the U.S., the public diplomacy of the Russian Federation is government-guided and government-sponsored. Nye criticizes Russia for failing to generate soft power because Russian soft power is generated solely by the state when a large component of soft power must be a product of the private sector and civil society with minimum guidelines by the state (Simons 2014).

*Anti-Americanism in Russian public diplomacy*

The majority of existing literature on Russian public diplomacy and soft power indicates anti-Americanism as a distinctive feature of Russian public diplomacy (Sukhova 2015; Dale 2012; Feklyunina 2016; Yablokov 2015 et al.). Dale (2012), while analyzing how countries such as China and Russia are employing public diplomacy to compete with the U.S., notes that the purpose of soft power according to Russian leaders is to “extend Russia’s influence and constrain America’s.” Previously, Dale and Ariel Cohen (2010) had explored anti-Americanism in Russian public diplomacy “as a strategic tool for pursuing domestic and foreign goals.” Dale and Cohen explain that the Kremlin intensified its anti-American rhetoric after the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) expansion into Central Europe and the Baltic states beginning at about a decade into the post-Cold War era. Whereas in domestic politics, Dale and Cohen claim that Russia presents the U.S. as “a principal adversary” to camouflage unsuccessful policies and legitimize Putin’s power. By “anti-Americanism,” it is meant the attempt by the Kremlin to develop clear anti-American messages and stress the importance of the Kremlin in “resisting American global hegemony.” Conspiracy theories around the U.S. have had a stance that Russia’s global mission is “a successful containment of the U.S., which only Putin was able to achieve” (Yablokov 2015 304).
Sukhova (2015) suggests a more complex analysis with regard to anti-Western or anti-American discourse of Russia’s public diplomacy. She argues that Russia has a dualistic perception of soft power. On the one hand, it perceives Western soft power as an external threat to the country’s sovereignty and national security; while on the other hand, Russian soft power is perceived by the Russian leadership as an opportunity to increase the country’s efficiency in attaining its foreign policy goals and to improve its international image. Sukhova concurs that Nye’s concept of soft power of attraction and persuasion contributed to the demise of the USSR and victory in the Cold War. At the same time, for Russia, “the same phenomenon”—i.e. U.S. soft power—“is associated with instability of the 1990s, ‘color revolutions’, Arab Spring, and anti-Putin protests, ... events perceived as [proof of] Western involvement and a threat to Russia’s national interests” (Sukhova 2015, 82). That is why Russia fears (American and) Western soft power, which promotes democratization, and as a countermeasure, Russia strives to oppose liberal values supported by the U.S. and its European allies.

Already in the late-1980s, Mikhail Gorbachev had “launched the idea of a ‘Common European Home’ ... [as] part of his campaign for New Political Thinking in [Soviet] foreign policy” (Caiser 2018, 17). Feklyunina (2016) points out that in 2000s, Russia also projected its image and place in the world as a part of Europe as “it projected a narrative of Russia’s belonging to the greater European civilization” (781). However, the 2004 “Orange Revolution” in Ukraine that brought to power the pro-Western Victor Yushchenko, preceded and followed by similar regimes changes in Georgia (2003) and Kyrgyzstan (2005), “was interpreted in Moscow as [having been] a result of democracy promotion by the EU and the U.S.” (781). Russia feared that it had lost in the soft power competition in its neighborhood and began to
perceive the West as a threat to its own power and influence. Russia thus launched its anti-Western policy aimed to stop any further erosion of its influence by preventing other actors, first and foremost, the U.S., NATO, and the EU, from encroaching into the “sphere of [its] privileged interests” (782).

Scholars as Wilson (2010) and Saari (2014) agree on the “Color Revolutions” as having been a source of the escalated anti-Western discourse of Russian public diplomacy. Per Wilson (2010), the said Color Revolutions posed real threats to Russia. According to Russia, itself, the Color Revolutions across the former Soviet states were the efforts of the Western actors, particularly the U.S. to promote regime change throughout the region. The Kremlin feared that the West under the guise of promoting democracy “would [also] seek to penetrate Russian political institutions” (Wilson 2010, 21). Saari (2014) demonstrates the fact that Russia viewed the Color Revolutions as a sign of losing her influence. Russia was worried that the West was winning the post-Cold War battle of ideas and influence in what it considers its own historical and cultural sphere of influence.

One also might observe the scholars of Russian public diplomacy discussing Russia’s inventions of alternative understanding of democracy or sovereignty. For example, Wilson (2010) elaborates on Russia’s response to the 2000s’ Color Revolutions, claiming that Russia invented a new term of “sovereign democracy,” intended as a variant of the Western model of liberal democracy. On a theoretical level, for Russia

sovereign democracy [is] generally considered to incorporate the specific cultural traits of Russian society and traditions; it serve[s] to defend the national interests and independence of Russia. More concretely, it [is] meant [as] the maintenance of a centralized political system, making use of what the Kremlin [has] referred to as a ‘vertical of power’ (Wilson 2010, 26).
Sukhova (2015) discusses the attempt of the Russian political elite to emphasize “the primacy of sovereignty over democracy and [opposition to] any foreign intervention into domestic affairs of sovereign states” (82). Russia is thus juxtaposing its values of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘security’ to the avowed Western values of ‘democracy’ and ‘human rights’. Russia, hence, promotes conservative values in opposition to Western liberal values, and, as does the West over Russia, Russia always stresses the priority of its own values over the West’s (Tafuro 2014). The Kremlin offers alternative narratives to the West as a defender of conservative values. Tafuro points that Putin highlights his “conservative vision, presenting the EU and the West … as decadent places where traditions and values are ‘eroding’” (2). As such, Russia does not neglect soft power, but it provides its own soft power as alternative narratives to Western values of democracy and human rights that it finds as to be challenging Kremlin’s authoritarian rule.

Post-Soviet space in Russian public diplomacy

There are studies with the focus on Russian public diplomacy and soft power activities in post-Soviet space that includes the Baltic states, for example. The literature on Russian public diplomacy in the post-Soviet space indicates a distinctive nature of Russian public diplomacy on the territories of the former Soviet Union. Tafuro (2014) demonstrates Russia’s different assets of using soft power in its neighborhood and mentions that when doing so, it combines its soft power in conjunction with hard power. Feklyunina’s (2016) argument is the creation of the collective identity of “Russian world” is primarily to keep the territories of the former USSR under Russia’s influence and control. Per Saari (2014), the CIS or post-Soviet territories are a priority for Russia, and this became evident as never before after the series of the so-called Color Revolutions begun in 2003.
There are two geographical approaches to the generated relations and communication in Russian public diplomacy. The first relates to the post-Soviet countries, which are thought should “naturally gravitate ... to the stronger Russian state” (Simons 2015, 4). The second relates to the territories beyond the CIS, where Russia projects “its attractive elements” such as sports, education, arts, and culture. According to Greg Simons (2015), “there has been a move away from an ideological basis of public diplomacy to a much more pragmatic and policy/goal oriented approach” by Russia (4). Simons (2014) had previously found that within the territory of the CIS a mixture of security, economic and cultural issues are used (or attempted, at least) as a means of soft power capital for Russia, and that this approach is based on Russia’s “assumption that there is a ‘natural’ attraction of weak powers to the strong on a voluntary basis” (443). Simons claims that some Russian officials urge the Kremlin to prioritize the regions in the accumulation of soft power through international development aid and economic assistance. For instance, they argue that, given geopolitical priorities, it is better to aid the CIS states, rather than African countries.

Wilson (2010) and Tafuro (2014) acknowledge that Russia promotes new models of regional economic, political and security integration within the post-Soviet space. Tafuro reviews the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as a Russia-led effort to counter the EU. However, in any regional organization in its neighborhood, Russia has encouraged “the asymmetry of the relations among partners in favor of Russia,” and it perceives it as a normal demand (Tafuro 2014, 3). Wilson (2010), in turn, perceives Russia’s new wave of active engagement with the CIS as the consequence of the Color Revolutions and Russia’s perception that the West wants to break and collapse Russian power in its sphere of influence (post-Soviet countries). As a result,
Russia has strengthened its involvement and activity in the CIS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Within the CSTO, member-states signed an agreement in October 2007 that provides conditions for “establishment of a Collective Rapid Response Force,” a form of “joint peacekeeping operation” (Wilson 2010, 29).

Saari (2014) discusses the influence of the Color Revolutions on Russian public diplomacy and soft power. She first makes some points on the evolvement of Russia’s perception of post-Soviet states. For example, she declares that after the collapse of the USSR, Russia invented the term “near abroad” to deal with the post-Soviet states and to have these territories under its influence. Russian public diplomacy in the post-Soviet countries is conducted within the term “humanitarian cooperation,” which refers to “compatriot and consular issues, culture, education, and media policies ...” (54). Osipova (2012), in turn, remarks on the emphasis of Russian public diplomacy on “international cultural-humanitarian cooperation,” which includes ties in arts and culture, science and education, mass media, youth exchanges, sports and tourism, as well as publishing- and museum-related activities” (13).

In general, the literature on Russian public diplomacy in the post-soviet space underlines the main methods and features of gaining soft power. One of the conclusions that might be made is that—similar to Washington, today—the Kremlin, too, does not understand the voluntary and subtle essence of soft power. The approach to cultural influence is conducted sometimes with “hard” and obtrusive approach. For Russia, the former Soviet sphere is an assumed inherited territory of Russian influence, where Russian soft power or influence should never be in doubt. That is why the Color Revolutions across the post-Soviet space that brought more Western-oriented leaders to power and NATO’s expansion into East and Central European
territory and the Baltics has made Russia intensify its public diplomacy activities as it took the real and presumed actions of the West as signals that Russia is in danger of losing its sphere of influence.

**Russian educational exchange programmes**

There is a dearth of academic work on educational exchange programmes, especially as a tool to gain soft power, and as a part of public diplomacy activities. And there are even fewer studies done on exchange programmes of Russia. This section intends to explore the existing sources on educational exchange programmes of Russia. It is important to review and analyze those existing sources.

Chepurina (2014), for example, highlights that higher education cooperation, which includes exchange programmes is in the toolkit of Russia’s public diplomacy, and that all of the projects of the Russian Government, such as Russkiy Mir, Rossotrudnichestvo, and the Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Support Foundation, “include an educational component, be it Russian language classes, international research projects or academic exchanges” (62). This is not a new phenomenon for Russia. In the mid-19th century, Tsarist Russia’s Ministry of Popular Education decided to enroll foreign students in Russian higher education institutions, as a result of which, the higher education institutes of Saint Petersburg, Moscow and Novorossiysk hosted students from Bulgaria, Albania, Bosnia, Serbia, among other countries. Osipova (2012), in turn, claims that official documents of the Russian government have a general agreement on the significance of cultural and educational exchanges and experiences. Providing educational experiences for foreign students, she writes, “help to cultivate productive long-term relationships with representatives of foreign nations, as well as create a lasting positive image of Russia” (16).
Sirke Mäkinen (2016), a Finnish scholar who has studied educational diplomacy of Russia, has herself been a part of such Russian public diplomacy. Mäkinen explores official Russian discourse on educational diplomacy, revealing the emphasis on the political rationale for educational diplomacy. She argues that the main rationale for internationalization of higher education is political and refers to the official documents of Russia on education and foreign policy to prove her point. The National Doctrine on Education and the Concept of Modernization of Russian Education, for example, refers to the education modernization as

a way to restore the status of Russia in the [global] community as the greatest state in the fields of education, culture, science, high technologies and economics [and] form the basis for the stable social, economic and cultural development of Russia. (quoted in Makinen 2016, 186)

Russian higher education has been attractive mainly to the students from the post-Soviet territories. Close to half (47.3%) of the foreign students in Russian universities come from the CIS. Mäkinen also presents statistics of the number of branches of Russian universities in the member CIS countries. She questions the strategic need for such institutions at a time when the post-Soviet space remains as the area with the most favorable attitudes to Russia, anyway. The official Russian discourse views that cross-border education can help Russia to achieve its foreign policy goals. One of the goals is to broaden and deepen the Eurasian integration. Official discourse also assumes that international students will

understand Russia while studying in a Russian university (or joint university), and that they would want to maintain good contacts after graduation and when working in their home country. That is, the alumni from the CIS would function as [de facto] “Russian diplomats” in their countries of origin, helping implement Russia’s foreign-policy goals. (Mäkinen 2016, 193)

Despite these efforts, according to Pugach (2012), the attractiveness of Russia’s higher education is on the decline. This can be seen in the lowering
percentage of foreign students in Russia. Still, claims Pugach, there are areas where Russia’s higher education is attractive, in particular with the countries of the CIS, Asia, and Arab world.

The specific literature on how Russian educational and exchange programmes influence people’s mind, values and beliefs are near non-existent. What we know is that Russian public diplomacy never directly tells that it is against liberal norms, however, Russia claims to deliver the alternative understanding of liberal norms, while criticizing the hypocritical liberalism of the U.S. A review of the Russian Government’s 2018 report titled: Annual Report of the Federation Council of The Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on the protection of state sovereignty and prevention of interference to internal affairs of the Russian Federation revealed Russia’s belief that the U.S. and EU educational and cultural exchange programmes are used to interfere in the internal affairs of Russia with the objective to delegitimize the Russian Government, and to destabilize the country. The report also notes that soft power is the main instrument of EU and the U.S. for external influence on sovereign states and that the EU and the U.S. promote social and political ideas, which contradict the original and traditional values of Russia.

The said report urges a strengthening of Russian sovereignty via education and culture. It also claims that by means of global media and various educational programmes available to it, the U.S. has implemented the image of a “city on a hill,” which has to spread its version of democracy and lead the world. The report refers to the case of post-WWII West Germany, when the U.S. spent large amounts of funds to expose the German people to American values, thus providing an opportunity to interfere and dominate West Germany. In general, the said report evaluates Western educational exchange programmes as a means of propaganda, and a way to destabilize
and undermine the sovereignty of Russia, arguing that such programmes require Russia to promote the opposite American values (GRF 2018).

**Exchange programmes for Kyrgyz citizens**

People in Kyrgyzstan are exposed to different foreign educational exchange programmes. Nowadays, Kyrgyz students prefer to apply for programmes with scholarships in either China, Russia, Turkey, the EU, or the U.S. This section intends to analyze and observe studies done on educational programmes or educational exchanges of the abovementioned states in Kyrgyzstan. Russia’s involvement in educational exchange programmes was already discussed above (in section titled “Russian public diplomacy and soft power”). I will thus not repeat the same here. However, studies on Chinese, U.S. and Turkish educational programmes as a soft power tool in Kyrgyzstan will be reviewed below.

Peachey (2017) studies the political socialization that is aimed by U.S. exchange programmes, by taking the case study of the Future Leaders Exchange Program (Flex) Alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. “Political socialization” is a field of research that studies value and identity formation and the transmission of political culture. Peachey explores whether via the Flex “public diplomacy exchange programme, [the] alumni become the kinds of people that funders want them to become” (2). Funders (normally the U.S. Government) want alumni to become more loyal and positive towards the U.S., and American culture as much as such. Peachey finds that there is a misalignment in alumni (or beneficiaries) views on the outcomes of the exchange programme and the funder’s (or benefactors) views on the outcomes of U.S. public diplomacy exchange programmes. The FLEX exchange programme alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan saw the outcomes of their educational experience in the U.S. in terms of “individual-level changes,” such as gaining new
skills and capacities, rather than a particular affinity towards America, American institutions, and culture (134). Peachey recommends that if Flex funders pursue to reach the outcomes of public diplomacy, a more rigorous selection of participants should be done. It means that the selection of

“right” individuals—that is, those who already espouse positive attitudes on the kinds of indicators of interest to the U.S. government and who are perceived would be successful in the exchange programme—this selection may play a larger role in explaining near-term attitudinal outcomes than the programme experience (treatment) itself. (Peachey 2017, 134)

Kevin Timlin (2017) studies the factors that potentially influence the achievement of the U.S. Global Undergraduate Exchange Programme (UGRAD) vis-à-vis the programme’s alumni from Kyrgyzstan. The first objective of the programme is “to help the former Soviet republics in their transition from a communist past to a hopefully democratic, open-market present.” This is supposedly done by developing the “personal, civic, academic, and professional skills” among the UGRAD participants (6). Timlin determined several factors that influence the achievement of the programme, the first being that “placing students in community colleges appears to be a bad policy due in large part to the lack of an academically challenging environment, limited on-campus housing facilities where international students can room with their U.S. peers, and little structured institutional support” (172). Timlin points the second factor which is that UGRAD exchange students who had high levels of professional and academic objectives were (naturally) more successful in trying to achieve the programme goals; while the third factor was that the sooner participants get involved in the academic or professional environment upon return in their home country, the probabilities are higher in using their experience from the U.S. and arriving at the programme’s objectives.
China, in turn, has been increasing its soft power tools worldwide to provide itself a peaceful international rise (Zhou and Luk 2016, 628). Beijing allocated 23 state scholarships for 2017/2018 education year for Kyrgyz students in higher educational institutions in China (Bengard 2017). There are 18 Confucius centers and Institutes in Kyrgyzstan (Nogayeva 2015). There are, however, still a limited number of studies on the Chinese educational programmes and its soft power in Central Asia, let alone Kyrgyzstan. Below I will review a few as dealing with Kyrgyzstan.

Zhou and Luk (2016) study Chinese soft power through the Confucius Institute. They argue that, despite efforts, the Confucius Institute fails to promote a positive image of China and to strengthen the soft power of China. The reasons behind the failure are that the Institute is perceived as a threat to academic freedom. They argue that China tries to pursue its national interests through soft power, but not to promote shared values and public goods and that the Confucius Institutes and Chinese exchanges are a purposeful propaganda with a badly managed agenda to act in accordance with national interests of China.

According to its own by-laws, the Confucius Institute’s aim is “to establish friendly relations between China and countries of the world by presenting the Chinese language and culture ...” (quoted in Nogayeva 2015, 595). Nogayeva explores the limitations of Chinese soft power in Central Asia through the lens of the Confucius Institute. Her main argument is that China named this soft power tool under the great thinker of the East so as to gain adherents and improve its image, however, the populations of Central Asia, who are afraid of a potential Chinese “demographic invasion” do not appear to have changed their negative attitudes towards China through mere free language cultural centers—the Confucius Institute (599). The second limitation is that it is in reality the SCO which is “the fundamental instrument
for China’s policies towards the region” and China uses the SCO to implement its soft power policies in the region. And, thus, the Confucius Institute and educational quotas of China are also associated with the SCO—an entity which is largely unknown and, if anything, also unpopular among the populations of the region (599).

For her part, Turkey began to invest in Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan immediately after the collapse of the USSR and was the first country to recognize the independence of Kyrgyzstan. Turkey perceived the post-Soviet era as a favorable occasion to strengthen its influence and appeal to people’s “Turkic” identity (Balci 2003). Particularly, the Gülen movement (a moderate Islamic based group with a focus on education) has taken a lead in promoting its view of soft power in Central Asia. The Gülen movement was established by Fethullah Gülen, an Islamic scholar living in the U.S. He established a large range of Islamic and secular educational organizations within Turkey, and launched influential networks of business, education, and religious organizations throughout the world. Balci (2014) argues that the Gülen movement in Central Asia established its presence “in a range of areas—from education to commerce to culture—by creating institutions intended to benefit both members of host communities and Turkish migrants” (2). The great importance is given to education and there are about 15 so-called Gülen schools (aka “Turkish lycées”) in Kyrgyzstan, in addition to the Gülen-funded Ataturk Alatoo University.

There has been an ongoing debate over the purpose of Gülen’s movement in Central Asia. In his earlier research, Balci (2003) argues that Gülen schools in Central Asia have the aim of re-Islamization of Central Asian republics and that they indirectly attempt to promote both a Turkic identity and spread the ideas of Islam as interpreted by Fethullah Gülen and the idea of his mentor, the Sufi scholar Said Nursi (1877-1960). Nursi had tried to promote a modern Islam in Turkey by means of
secular education. Despite some skeptics on the potential harm that the Gülen schools could harbor for Central Asia, Kyrgyz scholar Emil Joroev notes that there is a lack of evidence on Gülen schools posing a threat for the Kyrgyz government in relation to any form of religious radicalization (Recknagel 2016).

Balci (2014) analyzed the ongoing tensions between once allies Fethullah Gülen and Turkey’s Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. He predicted, “the power struggle between Gülen and Erdoğan will not be limited to the Turkish theater and will very likely extend abroad” (8). As Balci foresaw it, Erdoğan implicates Gülen for the events of mid-July of 2016 in Turkey, an attempted military coup to overthrow his regime. Erdoğan has called on Central Asian states to shut down all the educational institutions that have any relationship to Gülen. In 2016, however, Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambaev rejected Erdoğan’s suggestion, with the only change being made having been a nominal change to the Gülen schools. On his September 2018 visit to Kyrgyzstan, however, Erdoğan once again raised the issue of the Gülen schools operating on the territory of Kyrgyzstan, telling the new Kyrgyz President Sooranbai Zheenbekov that the Gülen network is a security threat for Kyrgyzstan (Reuters 2018). This matter remains unresolved, but evidence points in the direction that Kyrgyzstan does not perceive the Gülen educational and religious network as a threat to its security.

Chinar Meredova (2013) analyzes the impacts of the foreign-sponsored universities in Kyrgyzstan on their students. She interviewed undergraduate students of international politics in Turkish-Manas University, American University of Central Asia (AUCA) and the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavic University (KRSU) to discover whether students have a positive or negative image towards the sponsoring country—respectively, Turkey, the U.S., and Russia. Meredova revealed the incapability of
Turkish soft power since the students at the Turkish-Manas University were “ambivalent” in their thinking. However, she discovered that KRSU students were loyal to Russia’s policies and that their “mode of reflection [was] authoritarian,” while students at AUCA, which she labels as “critical liberal” were able to objectively evaluate U.S. policies in the region (39).

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed literature on American and Russian public diplomacy, and their public diplomacy activities in addition to those of China and Turkey in Kyrgyzstan. The literature on American public diplomacy uplifts the U.S. public diplomacy of the Cold War as a time of effective public diplomacy activities, and criticizes current the U.S. Government in undermining its own soft power and its over-reliance on hard power. The literature repeatedly indicates the importance of exchanges in enhancing positive image of the U.S., and promoting liberal American values and interests. It is believed that U.S. exchange programs make their participants open to American values.

Similar to American public diplomacy, Russian exchange programmes are considered as a toolkit of Russian public diplomacy to promote Russian values and interests. Nevertheless, the literature on Russian public diplomacy and soft power sees anti-Americanism as a key feature and juxtaposes its values to those promoted by the U.S. Russian public diplomacy in the post-Soviet space is thought to promote a collective identity of “Russian world” and tries to keep CIS members under Russian influence.

The third section reviewed several studies on educational programmes or exchanges of the U.S., China, and Turkey. The reviewed works hint that though every country has its own agenda while investing in education in Kyrgyzstan, social and
political values and beliefs of Kyrgyz exchange students remain under-studied. Despite this Thesis being limited to Russia and the U.S., it is still important to analyze and observe if political and social values of students indeed are under transition and affected when exposed to Russian or American public diplomacy and soft power.
Chapter IV

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes the data collected via FGs, and tests the proposed hypotheses of this Thesis. The main objective of the chapter is to reveal to what extent the experience of foreign exchanges in the U.S. vs. similar programmes in Russia affect the social and political views and sentiments of their participants, taking the case study of Kyrgyzstanis. Social and political views and sentiments are those associated with such liberal norms as women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic pluralism. The chapter also aims to discover to what extent influence of the experience of experiences of self-financed foreign workers in the U.S. vs. Russia differs from the experience of working in the U.S. vs. Russia. The findings are analyzed due to the principles and rules of the quasi-experimental research. First, it is important to indicate what questions were posed for the participants of experimental groups and control groups in order to get a sense of the changes in their socio-political views and sentiments as a result of their experiences abroad (see Table 2).

The first part of this chapter corresponds to the first three hypotheses of this Thesis, those of: \( H_1 \): Liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens due to exposure to both the U.S. and Russia; \( H_2 \): Higher level of liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens who participated in the U.S. vs. Russia; and \( H_3 \): Higher level of liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens who participated in sponsored educational programmes in the U.S. or Russia vs. to those who participated in self-financed work programmes. The second part of the chapter deals with \( H_4 \): Pro-American and pro-Russian sentiments of Kyrgyz citizens who participated in the stays in the U.S. and Russia.
Table 2: Questions posed to FGs

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Please, tell your age and where are going or have come back from.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Why did you decide to go to Russia or the U.S.? Why did you apply for this program?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>What do you expect from your cross-border experience? What did you expect from your cross-border experience and what did you get?</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>In your opinion, are women and men equal?</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>What are your thoughts about women working? Should she work outside of home if she has kids and her husband earns enough money?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>How would you react if a friend of yours rejected his/her supposed straight sexual orientation (heterosexuality)?</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Should two men or two women be allowed to marry each other? What is your opinion on the legalization of same-sex marriage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>What are your views on the participation of ethnic minorities in the national politics (as elected officials)? What do you think about having a non-ethnic Kyrgyz as president or prime minister?</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>What are your views on the politics of Russia, particularly the politics of Putin?</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>What do you think about the politics of the U.S., Trump?</td>
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<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>If you had a chance to move out from Kyrgyzstan, would you do so? If yes, where would you like to go?</td>
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**Analyses of H1, H2, H3: Liberal socio-political worldviews**

**H1**: Exposure of Kyrgyz citizens to both the U.S. and Russia increases their liberal socio-political worldviews (by way of opinions and attitudes on women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic pluralism).

**H2**: The level of liberal socio-political worldviews is higher for those Kyrgyz citizens who participated in stays in the U.S. as opposed to Russia.

**H3**: The level of liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens is higher for those who participated in sponsored educational programmes in the U.S. or Russia as opposed to those who were on self-financed work programmes.

The above hypotheses are analyzed based on conducted FGs. Mainly, these hypotheses require comparison and analysis of the answers between participants of all experimental FGs and control groups (see Table 1 in Chapter II). The Thesis has two main experimental groups. The first group is Kyrgyz citizens exposed or going to be exposed to educational exchange programs of the U.S. and Russia. Two FGs were conducted among Flex and UGRAD students each who have been or were going to
the U.S. In addition, Kyrgyz students who have studied or were about to study in Russian universities on scholarships took part in terms of the first experimental group, also with one FG per category. The host governments, specifically Russia and the U.S., covered all the expenses of Kyrgyz exchange students.

The second experimental group is Kyrgyz citizens who have been or are going to the U.S. and Russia with self-financed job purposes. These are participants of the U.S. Work and Travel programme and citizens who have been or are going to Russia to work in service sectors composed the second experimental group. Work and Travel programme to the U.S. gives an opportunity to get a J-1 visa, which is the visa for students and exchange students. There are two types of J-1 visas. J-1 visa for Work and Travel programme implies getting an American Social Security number in the U.S. Social Security number is equivalent to a work permit. All students who go to the U.S. by Work and Travel programme stay in the U.S. for summertime, and normally work in the services sector. The participants themselves cover all the expenses of the programme such as job offer, flights, accommodation, and food. Kyrgyz citizens, in turn, go to Russia to earn money, and mainly they receive jobs in the services sector or the construction industry or even in agricultural field. Kyrgyz citizens, too, on their own cover all the expenses with flights, accommodation, and work permit. A total of four FGs would be associate each the above categories of Kyrgyz citizens who are going to the U.S. and Russia for work purposes (1 FG per category), and those who are about to do so (also 1 FG per category).

The control groups consisted of young people between 18-25 years of age who have never been abroad and do not have any plans of going abroad in the nearest future. These control groups (composed of 2 FGs in the research design) are significantly important since they are able to show if the cross-border experiences
Indeed influence social and political views and sentiments of Kyrgyz citizens. In control groups, the independent variable (Going Abroad) is not introduced. Thus, for the analysis of the $H_1$, $H_2$, $H_3$, I will consider and analyze discussions of two experimental groups that have pretest groups (participants who were about to leave Kyrgyzstan to the U.S. or Russia for sponsored study or self-financed work purposes), and posttest groups (participants who have come back after their stays in the U.S. and Russia from the same programmes), and two control groups—thus a total of 10 FGs (see Appendix A).

**Cross-border experience of Kyrgyz citizens in the U.S.**

*Influence of sponsored educational exchange programs in the U.S.*

FG#1 is a group of five Kyrgyz students who were about to leave Kyrgyzstan to the U.S. to do their exchange year. FG#1 is a pretest group, where the independent variable (Going Abroad) is not introduced yet. FG#2 is a posttest group of four, where the independent variable is introduced. All the participants in FG#1 and FG#2 were asked the questions on women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic minority rights to reveal their social and political views and sentiments vis-à-vis the liberal norms.

FG#1 is a group discussion with three Flex finalists, and one American University of Central Asia (AUCA) student who was granted to do sponsored exchange semester at Bard College in the U.S. These students were selected to do their exchange year in the American schools and universities and live with American host families or dormitories, as in the case of the AUCA student. FG#2 participants have come back from the U.S. after their U.S. government-sponsored educational stays. Particularly, FG#2 was composed of four Flex alumni 2017-2018. The finalists of the U.S. sponsored exchange programs answered the question on how they would react if one of their friends rejected his/her straight sexual orientation
(heterosexuality), and their views on same-sex marriage (homosexuality). FG#1 participants were not critical or radical towards representatives of LGBT. However, many of them were ambivalent on the topic. For instance, P3/FG#1 claimed:

“I can support [an LGBT friend] of course... However, I cannot accept this since I am a Muslim and I would try to explain to him [why he is wrong]... This situation is a two-sided coin, from the American perspective we should support [such friends] and let them to be happy. Nevertheless, from the side of religion or science, it is not a normal life; every person in this life should live a normal life and grow his own kids... Yes, LGBT couples can adopt a child but...”

P2/FG#1 declared that she could support the LGBT idea as far as it is not propagated massively,

“I had this kind of situation, and I would support this person as far as he will not try to change my mind considering my own personal opinion. However, I do not want it to be propagated massively in order for these ideas to be thrust on others. Recently, same-sex marriage is being thrust on others.”

P5/FG#1 added,

“It does not matter if he/she is lesbian or gay. I will be friends with them, but not too close because you never know what will happen in the future. I would react as if I don’t care but keep the distance.”

Discussion of the topic on LGBT rights revealed four of five, thus 80 percent, of FG#1 participants were ready to support an LGBT friend; one was confused, but mostly against it. Though all the participants were against supporting same-sex marriage, they nonetheless were ready to support LGBT friends as far as the issue of LGBT rights is not broadly discussed and represented in their friendship.

Participants of FG#2 shared their opinion on LGBT rights. Three of four, thus 75 percent, agreed that it is okay for them and they would support an LGBT friend; moreover, they expressed their support on same-sex marriage. P2/FG#2 noted:

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2 FG#1, finalists of U.S. sponsored Flex educational exchange programme, Skype FG, 11 July 2018.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
“In the U.S., it was a cultural shock for me. I’ve never met LGBT people before. But now after being in the U.S., that’s okay. I would say that LGBT people have a right to build a family, and I am not against same-gender marriages.”

P3/FG#2 shared her experience as such:

“When I was in Kyrgyzstan and I hadn’t met them [people of the LGBT community], though in my small town I had heard that in one lycée there were girls who are together. Therefore, [the idea] was so bad for me, as I was growing up in the conservative family and that is why I thought so. However, after coming to the U.S., I realized that the orientation of a person does not decide who this man or woman is. He or she still can be nice or bad.”

However, P1/FG#2 was not ready to either support an LGBT friend or same-sex marriage,

“If I knew that he or she is not straight, I will be okay with them, but limit myself to being close with them, as my attitude is not good on this issue. Maybe it is because I am from a religious family. Moreover, I do not think that we should support the legalization of same-sex marriages.”

According to the analysis and comparison of views on LGBT between pretest and posttest experimental groups, which consisted of participants who were going and have come back from the U.S. after their sponsored exchange year in the U.S., it can be said that exposure to the U.S. influences Kyrgyz Flex alumni’s view on LGBT rights. If participants of pretest FG#1 were ready to support an LGBT friend but were against legalizing the relationship between LGBT people, the far majority of participants of posttest FG#2 were ready to support either LGBT friend or same-sex marriages, except P1/FG#2, who was against the idea due to what he claimed as his religious upbringing.

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5 FG#2, Flex alumni of U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.
6 Turkish Lycées are schools sponsored by the Fethullah Gülen movement, where females and males study and live separately.
7 FG#2, Flex alumni of U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.
8 Ibid.
To test whether educational exchange programs made Kyrgyz students less
nationalistic and drop or have less sentiments of ethnic nationalism than prior to their
educational stay abroad, both of the above groups of people were asked the questions:

*What do they think of electing a non-Kyrgyz individual to the post of the President or
Prime Minister? Would vote for a non-Kyrgyz candidate?* All the finalists of the U.S.
exchange programmes (participants of the pretest experimental group) expressed their
support for ethnic minorities if the candidate is able to work effectively for the
Kyrgyz government. The finalists claimed that ethnicity does not matter as long as
this candidate is a citizen of Kyrgyzstan.

All the participants of FG#1 had practically agreed with P4/FG#1:

“I would definitely vote for a non-Kyrgyz candidate if he is
professional and skillful. The reason we need representatives of these
ethnic minorities because in Kyrgyzstan their rights are frequently
suppressed.”

The alumni of the U.S. educational exchange programmes (FG#2) were not
against having the non-Kyrgyz President, where three of four students were Kyrgyz.
One of the FG#2 participants said:

“The ethnicity of the person is not important, but what is always
important is [the ability in] … running the government, the country …
I mean skills.”

Another Kyrgyzstani participant, P1/FG#2, an ethnic Tajik, noted:

“I also would like to see our government to be diverse. … In America,
there is a [prominent] person whose origins are from South Korea, and
he works in the Pentagon. He is one of the main generals … In
addition, they trust their government … Why wouldn’t we trust our
government to our people …? For example, I myself am not Kyrgyz; I
am Tajik. I would be happy if they accept me … Yeah, I know that I
can work in the government, but I am not sure I’ll be respected as
much as other nationalities.”

9 FG#1, finalists of U.S. sponsored Flex educational exchange programme, Skype FG, 11 July 2018.
10 FG#2, Flex alumni of U.S. sponsored educational exchange programme, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.
The above-mentioned analysis suggests that exposure to the U.S. via exchange programs has not necessarily changed or influenced exchange students’ opinions on ethnic minorities, as participants of both pretest and posttest focus groups were tolerant of ethnic minorities and noted the importance of skills of ethnic minorities in the participation in the national politics. However, for a definite conclusion on the influence of the exchange programs on the sentiments of ethnic pluralism the ideas of the control groups will also be reviewed later.

FG#1 and FG#2 participants elaborated on women’s rights, particularly whether women and men are equal as genders, and if a woman should have the freedom to work when she has a large family and kids, and her husband earns enough money. All of the participants of FG#1 were neither strongly positive nor strongly negative about women’s rights, all of them answering that such a question very much depends on families and their opportunities. P4/FG#1 said, for example, that:

“First of all, it depends on woman’s choice and wish. If she wants to work why not and if she does not want that is okay, as well.”\(^{11}\)

Whereas participants agreed with P4/FG#1, P5/FG#1 added,

“Of course a woman aspires to good education and job opportunities. A woman has to get a proper education, but if she cannot handle a family and a career at the same time, I think, she has to find a job where she can work from home or she has to quit her job since it is better to take care of the family.”\(^{12}\)

FG#1 being a pretest experimental focus group did not demonstrate a particular tendency in their answers on women’s rights and choices. On the whole, however, they had the opinion that women’s rights of working outside of one’s home and gender equality are dependent on one’s particular life circumstances. Flex alumni or participants of posttest FG#2 though had supportive attitudes. Answering this

\(^{11}\) FG#1: finalists of U.S. sponsored Flex educational exchange programme, Skype FG, 11 July 2018.
\(^{12}\) Ibid.
question, FG#2 participants were comparing women’s place and role in the U.S. and in Kyrgyzstan, even though they were not asked to do such a comparison. All FG#2 participants told that women should work and grow, and that they should have equal rights. They were giving examples from their host families, and comparing them to Kyrgyzstan. P4/FG#2, a male, shared his position as such:

“Over here [in Kyrgyzstan] mostly in the countryside or religious families people say that you are a woman, you are a girl, you have to sit at home and you have to take care of kids. You are a woman, you do not have to do these things and say these things. As a woman, you have your constructed roles. In the United States, it is not like that, women and men are equal, and they work equally, yes, in the United States it could be different in different families. Still here, women should say: This is my right, I want to work, I have to work. In Kyrgyzstan, women have to know and fight for their rights.”

P2/FG#2, in turn, noted that even though in her host family, her host mother did not consider herself as equal with her husband, but they were sharing responsibilities equally:

“In my [American host] family, my mom usually cooked a meal and dad washed the dishes afterwards. They worked the same amount of time, they came [home] together [after work], and they did the same type of job. My dad always changed the diapers of the girls, and my mom did it, too. ... they were equally tired...”

Two of the participants, P3/FG#2 and P4/FG#2, touched upon the case of divorce:

“Here in Kyrgyzstan if you are divorced, it means that woman should have done something wrong. Everything [bad] is [put] on the woman. Even when a woman is bride kidnapped, people will say that it is the fault of the girl because she was open, she was talking to men in a different way [than she should have].”

It could be suggested that the experience of the U.S. exchange programs make Kyrgyz citizens aware of problems of women’s rights in the society, and make them more liberal in terms of their sentiments towards women’s rights. In general, because

13 FG#2: Flex alumni of U.S. sponsored educational exchange programme, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
of the analysis of Kyrgyz citizens’ views before and after the exchange year in the U.S., it could be stated that the U.S. sponsored exchange programmes have a potential to influence on social and political attitudes, and impose liberal views on their participants.

**Influence of self-financed work visa stays in the U.S.**

FG#3 and FG#4 are experimental groups as well. However, participants of these focus groups were going or have come back from the U.S. after their self-financed stays via Work and Travel programme. FG#3 is a group in which independent variable (going abroad via self-financed work visa stays in the U.S.) is not introduced yet, hence a pretest group. FG#4 is composed of Kyrgyz citizens who have already been to the U.S. via Work and Travel programme, hence a posttest group. The questions on liberal norms on the issues of women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic pluralism were addressed during both focus groups.

There was not any difference in the attitudes on LGBT rights between pretest and posttest experimental groups of self-finance work visa stays in the U.S. Participants of both groups were critical about LGBT rights. As P1/FG#3 noted:

“I am tolerant and fine with LGBT friends. However, there is another side of the coin. I would not be happy to have an LGBT kid.”

And every FG#3 participant agreed with P3/FG#3, who shared that LGBT people venture themselves “too much”:

“I was tolerant and fine with them before my visit to one of the pubs in the city. At this pub, one of the gays slapped his friend, and it was too much, they are up to all sorts of nonsense.”

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16 FG#3 (a pretest FG): Kyrgyz citizens who are going to the U.S. by self-financed Work and Travel programme, Bishkek, 14 May 2018.

17 Ibid.
Perhaps what’s more revealing is that participants who have been to the U.S. by self-finance Work and Travel programme (FG#4) did not have different or more supportive opinion on LGBT rights, either. Two of them, P1/FG#4 and P4/FG#4, were ready to support an LGBT friend; however, they were against of the legalization of same-sex marriages. P1/FG#4 contributed to the discussion as follows:

“If a friend of mine rejected his or her straight orientation, I would support him. I think it is not his fault. He was born like this. I do not judge people like this. LGBT representatives are the same people like we are, I know it, but I am not ready to support same-sex marriages.”

P2/FG#4 and P3/FG#4, in turn, had strongly negative views on LGBT representatives and the possibility of the legalization of same-sex marriages. P2/FG#4 said:

“I am against LGBT people. I don’t support them and disagree with LGBT rights. If a friend of mine rejected his or her straight orientation, I would stop having any contact with him or her. I think it is not normal from the point of religion and Kyrgyz culture.”

It can be concluded that work experience in the U.S. did not change the attitudes of Kyrgyz citizens on LGBT rights given that participants of pretest (FG#3) and posttest (FG#4) groups were not fully supportive of LGBT rights.

Participants of FG#3 had a very hot debate on the rights of ethnic minorities. They were clearly divided on the topic. Two of four participants in the group were supportive of ethnic minorities. P3/FG#3 and P4/FG#3 were supportive, whereas P1/FG#3 and P2/FG#3 were not. P1/FG#3 expressed her opinion as follows:

“Talking about ethnic minorities … I think they have to respect our laws … if a particular ethnicity lives in its own state, for instance, Kyrgyz people in Kyrgyzstan, they should have more rights.”

Others in the group, such as P4/FG#3, opposed her view, however:

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18 FG#4 (a posttest FG): Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from the U.S. after self-financed Work and Travel programme, Skype FG, 15 September 2018.

19 Ibid.

20 FG#3 (a pretest FG): Kyrgyz citizens who are going to the U.S. by self-financed Work and Travel programme, Bishkek, 14 May 2018.
“I think as far as you are a citizen of this state you have the same rights and duties as any other ethnicity living and being citizens of Kyrgyzstan.”21

P3/FG#3 agreed and added:

“I think in any government all high-level positions should be divided by representatives of different ethnicities of the state. I think in our country the rights of ethnic minorities are discriminated.”22

Participants of FG#4 who spent three months in the U.S. on self-financed Work and Travel programme were not supportive of ethnic pluralism. Even though they admitted to the possibility to vote for a non-Kyrgyz candidate in the case that a Kyrgyz candidate is not good enough. Only one, P1/FG#4, concurred with the ethnic pluralism norm:

“If we have a non-Kyrgyz candidate for the presidential post, I do not mind to support if he is better than Kyrgyz candidate.”23

All other three FG#4 participants demonstrated negative attitudes towards the possibility of having a non-Kyrgyz president or prime minister; they explained it by way of telling that Kyrgyzstan being a “Kyrgyz land” or referring to other citizens with Kyrgyz ethnicity who will not allow being ruled by a non-Kyrgyz. P2/FG#4, for example, said:

“It is not all good to have a non-Kyrgyz President or Prime Minister. This is Kyrgyzstan, a country of the Kyrgyz. We all have to be patriots, and we should not allow other ethnicities to take over and rule our government.”24

P4/FG#4 shared this sentiment, as well:

“I do not support a non-Kyrgyz candidate for the post of President, because it is not acceptable for our people. I do not think that in the

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 FG#4 (a posttest FG): Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from the U.S. after self-financed Work and Travel programme, via Skype, 15 September 2018.
24 Ibid.
nearest future we will have a non-Kyrgyz president.”25

Thus, following the analysis of experimental groups suggests that Kyrgyz citizens did not necessarily change their views on ethnic pluralism after their self-financed work visa stays in the U.S. Participants of pretest FG#3 (self-financed work and travel in the U.S.) left room for discussion of the rights of ethnic minority rights or ethnic pluralism, but it was not the case among participants of posttest FG#4. Participants of both groups were at nearly the same age, and gender diversity was also maintained.

Kyrgyz citizens who were about to leave Kyrgyzstan (FG#3) to the U.S. by work and travel were also more tolerant of women’s rights and gender equality than participants of the posttest group (FG#4). Participants of FG#3 discussed in what way women feel not equal to men while telling that women should try to work and try to have a career along with as do their male family members. P2/FG#3 shared his opinion as such:

“In the case of women in Kyrgyzstan, very often they feel equal with men just in the universities … In other situations, men are superior … Nobody rejects the importance of family, however, as a woman has to study and work, at the same time to take care of the family.”26

Three of the four FG#4 participants did not consider men and women to be equal. P1/FG#4 claimed that men and women are equal, but she put males in the position of having to be the money earners and taking care of the families and wives. Participants of this group, on the whole, did not really support women’s rights and gender equality. P1/FG#4 had a contradicting point of view, but which was not fully supportive of gender equality:

25 Ibid.
26 FG#3 (a pretest FG), Kyrgyz citizens who are going to the U.S. by self-financed Work and Travel programme, Bishkek, 14 May 2018.
“My mother is an example for me. And our family is big, there are four kids, and my father earns enough money. However, my mother works, and it is told in our family that my mom works for herself. But for any woman, a family is more important than a career. That is why my parents do not allow me to go abroad for studies. They think that if I live abroad I am going put career as part of my priorities.”

P2/FG#4, in turn, claimed that women and men are not equal, and all other participants in one or way or another had similar opinions on women’s rights. P2/FG#4 said:

“Women and men are not equal. Gender plays a great role; males are heads of the family. Therefore, I do not think that a woman should work if she has kids and her husband earns enough money. In my family, my mom never worked, a woman has to care about the family, and a woman should devote herself to a family and husband, but not to a career. No doubt, for a woman a family is more important than career.”

It thus turns out that participants of the U.S. Work and Travel programme do not necessarily change their opinion on women’s rights. Nevertheless, analysis of the posttest FG#4 shows a great significance put on the family as part of one's social and political views. The above analysis suggests that not all the cross-border experience in the U.S. make Kyrgyz citizens obtain more liberal socio-political worldviews (on women’s rights, LGBT rights, and ethnic pluralism). The U.S. government-sponsored educational exchange programmes are more probable to induce changes in the socio-political views of Kyrgyz citizens.

Nye (2004a) explains that soft power is when citizens of other foreign states admire the U.S. values, and want to have the U.S. as a role model. Kyrgyz citizens who have been to the U.S. via Flex, which is the U.S. government-sponsored educational exchange programme, referred positively to their experience in the U.S.,

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27 FG#4 (a posttest FG): Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from the U.S. after self-financed Work and Travel programme, via Skype, 15 September 2018.
28 Ibid.
and the experience seems to have brought a shift in their worldviews on LGBT, ethnic and women’s rights. Self-financed work visa stays in the U.S., on the other hand, did not suggest any particular shifts in socio-political views of Kyrgyz citizens. This could be explained by their short time being in the U.S., or slightly different context as to where they spent their time or what were their living arrangements in the U.S., for example. Participants of Work and Travel programme worked in services sector, and the expectation of their stays in the U.S. was different. All the participants of FG#2 have agreed that they applied for Flex because they had known that it grants many opportunities for a good future. As one of Flex alumni noted,

“We knew that there are a lot of opportunities for the future, so that we could live [better]... Even after becoming alumni you have so many things going on. You really benefit from it [the Flex programme].”

However, participants of self-financed Work and Travel programme had the primary purpose of making money in the U.S. P2/FG#4 reflected on this matter as such:

“I went to the U.S. through this programme because I wanted to make money to pay for my university tuition [here in Kyrgyzstan]. I study at AUCA. I made sufficient money [to pay my tuition fees].”

Nye (2004) is right when he argues about different context, receivers and their level of acceptance in promoting soft power through American public diplomacy activities as exchange programmes. The literature on American exchange programmes does not doubt that cross-border experience of foreign citizens sometimes do not promote American values of human rights, because it depends on the kind of exchange programme, participants religiosity or participants’ ability or opportunity to be exposed to liberal norms that the U.S. represents.

29 FG#2: Flex alumni of U.S. sponsored educational exchange programme, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.
30 FG#4 (a posttest FG): Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from the U.S. after self-financed Work and Travel programme, via Skype, 15 September 2018.
Cross-border experience of Kyrgyz citizens in Russia

Influence of sponsored educational exchange programs in Russia

To find out how Russian public diplomacy activities influence on Kyrgyz citizens, I conducted FGs among students who were going (pretest, FG#5) and have come back (posttest, FG#6) from Russia after their stays in Russia with the purpose of getting an education. For FG#5 and FG#6, the Government of the Russian Federation was to be or already had been the sponsor of their studies in Russia. Focus groups were conducted to reveal students’ attitudes vis-à-vis liberal views as a potential outcome of their stay in Russia. That said, as discussed earlier in this Thesis, the Russian Government generally perceives liberal norms as a product of the West, and Western exchange programs and certain foreign aid projects as a threat to its sovereignty.

If to compare views of participants of pretest (FG#5) and posttest (FG#6) on LGBT rights, for example, they were not much different from each other. The difference was that Kyrgyz students who have come back from Russia were ready to explain and expand on their opinions. In comparison with the exchange students to the U.S., they were not referring to their Russian experience when doing so. That said, participants of both FG#5 and FG#6 were ready to support an LGBT friend; however, they were critically against same-sex marriages.

P1/FG#5 and P2/FG#5, peculiarly enough, said that they were ready to support female LGBT friends, but not male LGBT friends. It is worth noting that both of them were males. P1/FG#5 contributed as such:

“If this friend is male, I will not support him and will keep my distance. Maybe I will even stop talking to him. However, if this friend is a female, I will support her and will continue being friends. This does not mean, however, that I support the legalization of same-gender
marriage. I strongly disagree with same-sex marriages.”\textsuperscript{31}

P4/FG\#5 concurred:

“I agree with him. Many consider me as a conservative. And yes, I am conservative. I think that legalization of same-sex marriages will not lead to something good, it will destroy our society.”\textsuperscript{32}

Regarding LGBT rights, answers of posttest FG\#6 were interesting, all four returning students were ready to support and continue friendship if one of their friends were gay or lesbian. However, all of them disagreed to legalize same-sex marriage.

P2/FG\#6 wrapped the LGBT issue as a security threat:

“From the point of rights and freedom, of course, I would say yes. But from the point of what kind of information I have received, I would say that first of all this is a threat to national security because they [the LGBT] do not continue the bloodline or they do not give offspring. Yes, there are kids in orphans, but not all same-sex families would like to adopt a kid, even all of them are ready to adopt. But when there is no kid in orphans what is then? And there is a high possibility that a kid who is grown up in a non-traditional family will have non-traditional orientation.”\textsuperscript{33}

P3/FG\#6 told that she is against the legalization of same-sex marriages. If it is unavoidable, she could support the legalization of same-sex marriages with the condition to prohibit adopting of children by same-sex couples. P4/FG\#6, in turn, said that she would support and agree with LGBT rights on the assumption of her personal experience, but it is not possible to do it right now.

If pretest experimental group’s (FG\#5) were not really able to justify or explain their sentiments and points on LGBT rights, participants of posttest experimental group (FG\#6, those exposed to Russia through GRF-sponsored educational programmes) were able to justify their largely anti-LGBT opinions with

\textsuperscript{31} FG\#5: Kyrgyz citizens who were about to leave Kyrgyzstan for Russia-sponsored studies in Russia, Osh, 8 August, 2018.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33} FG\#6: Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from Russia after Russia-sponsored studies, Bishkek, 19 July 2018.
deep answers. Indeed, there were no significant liberal shifts of socio-political stances on LGBT rights by such participants who had studied in Russia.

Participants of pretest experimental group (FG#5, those who were to leave to Russia on GRF-sponsored educational programmes) agreed that women and men are equal, but for women, family is or ought to be the most important thing. It is worth noting that the answers of students (posttest, FG#6) who have come back to Kyrgyzstan after their GRF-sponsored studies in Russia are significantly different from those who have come after their exchange in the U.S. in a number of ways: First, all of them expressed their opinion on women’s rights in a different manner. One of the participants of the posttest FG#6 perceived women’s rights as something that is the circumstance of modern times and the world, but not as something that women have to have in anytime. Some participants of FG#6 said that, of course, they are for equality, but frequently women’s place and choice is dependent on life’s circumstances.

P1/FG#5 stated that women’s rights came with progress:

“For my female classmates, it seems that career is more important than a family. I think this is because of the progress. Before a woman was dedicated to a family. In my personal opinion, I think that women should put her family as a priority.”

P2/FG#6 expanded on gender equality. He, as did P1/FG#5, perceived equality between men and women just as the consequence of the modern’s world development:

“As things go nowadays, you could say that women and men are equal. I will not go into details, because it is a philosophical question. When it comes to whether she should work, .... I would say it is her choice. Due to nowadays realities you cannot force women to work or sit at home. Maybe before there was a strict separation of responsibilities of

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34 FG#5: Kyrgyz citizens who are about to leave Kyrgyzstan for Russia-sponsored studies in Russia, Osh, 8 August 2018.
men and women, but today because of the progress, you cannot.”

P4/FG#5 responded that if a woman is able to have a career and take care of a family equally and at the same time, she can have family and career all together:

“I think that if she succeeds in her career and family at the same time, it is fine. But if she has kids and there is no time for them, she should quit her job.”

P4/FG#6, in turn, did not have a specific opinion on whether women and men are equal, but also was open to women working outside of home:

“Man is chief and superior. He has the last word. Anyway, we [woman] are weak. We cannot make the responsible decisions on our own. If there is a choice between family and career, of course, for a woman, the family is the most important. But if there is an opportunity to have a career, it is also not right just to sit at home.”

There was not any big difference in views of students who were going (FG#5) and who have come back (FG#6) after their studies in Russia. Participants of both groups perceived men and women as equal genders; however, they put men as “head of a family,” or perceived women’s rights as the tendency of the contemporary times due to the progress and historical developments.

On ethnic minority rights, participants of both FG#5 and FG#6 were against having a non-ethnic Kyrgyz as president or prime minister. P2/FG#5, for example, declared that he does not want to see any non-Kyrgyz ethnicities in politics, simply because ethnic Kyrgyz should run the politics of Kyrgyzstan:

“I am against [ethnic minorities in position of leadership]. I do not want to see any other ethnicities in the politics of Kyrgyzstan, especially when it comes to high-level posts as Presidency. No, I do

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35 FG#6: Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from Russia after Russia-sponsored studies, Bishkek, 19 July 2018.
36 FG#5: Kyrgyz citizens who are about to leave Kyrgyzstan for Russia-sponsored studies in Russia, Osh, 8 August 2018.
37 Ibid.
not want to have a Tajik or Uzbek Prime Minister.”

P3/FG#5 had a concluding answer and pointed out,

“In high-level posts, I would like to see ethnic Kyrgyz. However, it is fine to give quotas for representatives of other ethnicities, but these quotas should have a moderate amount. If these quotas exceed the limited amount, we will lose our identity.”

P3/FG#6 stated that representatives of different ethnic communities should be among elected officials, but not for high-level positions:

“On the national level, if a representative of non-titular nation runs for Presidency or any other high-level posts, it will contradict the name and meaning of a titular nation. For instance, if an Uzbek candidate becomes President [of Kyrgyzstan], the nation will not be happy because the majority is Kyrgyz ethnicity. It would be possible if there were not any gradation of ethnicity, if there was not a place in one’s passport as “ethnicity.” I would not vote and support a non-Kyrgyz candidate, even though I am not Kyrgyz, myself.”

P4/FG#6 explained that the head and the leader of the country has to be Kyrgyz,

“I think that the President should be Kyrgyz. This is not the case for ministers, however, because as we see, we have non-Kyrgyz ministers. However, the head and the leader should be Kyrgyz. I think so; and I am not Kyrgyz myself.”

If students who have been (FG#2) or are going to America (FG#1) by via U.S. Government-funded educational exchange programmes expressed their support and agreement to have a non-Kyrgyz President in Kyrgyzstan, in the case of students who have been (FG#6, posttest) or going to Russia (FG#5, pretest) with the purpose of studying were critical of the topic, and preferred to have an ethnic Kyrgyz as President of the Republic; and this was are quite surprising given that two of four participants of FG#6 were not ethnic Kyrgyz, themselves. The analysis of the focus

38 FG#5: Kyrgyz citizens who are about to leave Kyrgyzstan for Russia-sponsored studies in Russia, Osh, 8 August 2018.
39 Ibid.
40 FG#6: Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from Russia after sponsored studies, Bishkek, 19 July 2018.
41 Ibid.
groups conducted among participants who were going and have come back from Russia after the studies suggest that Russian educational programmes do not change or cause a liberal shift in views of Kyrgyz citizens on LGBT rights, women’s rights, and ethnic pluralism.

*Experience in self-financed work visa stays in Russia* (FG#7 and FG#8)

Focus groups were conducted among people who were about to leave to Russia (FG#7) and those who have come back from Russia (FG#8) to Kyrgyzstan after self-financed work visa stays in that country. The FG#7 was conducted among people who were going to work in the services sector. Similarly, a focus group (FG#3) was conducted among Kyrgyz citizens who were going to the U.S. by Work and Travel program, all Work and Travel students mostly work in services sector as well. In both cases, participants cover their own expenses.

First, the limitation of this analysis is that Kyrgyz citizens who go to Russia could be less educated, and have a lower social status than those who go to the U.S. Before going to the U.S. by Work and Travel programme participants verify documents about the salary of their sponsors (usually sponsors are parents). That is why it may appear inappropriate to compare their social and political views.

There was not any difference in the answers of pretest (FG#7) and posttest (FG#8) groups. Group dimensions were the same in both groups of people who stayed or were going to Russia with job purposes. For example, in both groups participants were strongly critical, and it could even be stated they had radical views, on LGBT rights. Participants of FG#7 were confused about the question whether they would support a friend with non-traditional orientation and their point on same-sex marriages. P2/FG#7 reacted in a negative way:
“What is this question? I will not respond to it.”\(^{42}\)

And P1/FG#7 walked away when the question on LGBT rights was addressed.

P3/FG#7 and P4/FG#7 commented:

“It [LGBT] is not good and fine. It never has to exist.”\(^{43}\)

All FG#8 participants were also critical of LGBT and did not like the question.

P4/FG#8 got angry and raised his voice: “It is enough!”\(^{44}\) P1/FG#8 answered:

“I would kill this friend, and I am ready to be in jail for this crime. I would never ever support same-sex marriages. Let us imagine that your brother is gay, what do you feel? I am sure it is painful. No... Never...”\(^{45}\)

If in all previous experimental and control groups, discussion on LGBT rights took place in a calm manner, Kyrgyz citizens who have been and going to Russia to work in services sector reacted aggressively to the same. It was not possible to have a deep and explanatory discussion on LGBT rights with FG#7 and FG#8 participants.

On the subject of women’s rights, and whether woman and men are equal, and if a woman should work outside of home when she has kids and her husband earns enough money, as mentioned before, all FG#7 and FG#8 participants had the same opinions. Both impending and returning Kyrgyz labor migrants to Russia perceived a man as superior to a woman, and they disagreed that women and men are equal. They also concurred that women should only work outside of the house when the family needs additional contribution to its budget. P5/FG#7, for example, said:

“We live in a democratic society where everyone is equal. Women and men are equal, but in reality, women are the ‘weaker sex’. On your question as to whether women should work when she has kids and a family, I would give an example of my family. My wife has a

\(^{42}\) FG#7: Kyrgyzstanis about to leave to Russia on self-financed work purposes, Osh, 1 August 2018.

\(^{43}\) Ibid.

\(^{44}\) FG#8: Kyrgyzstanis who have come back from Russia after self-financed work visa stay, Bishkek, 10 August 2018.

\(^{45}\) Ibid.
[university] diploma and of course she works.”

However, P4/FG#7 disagreed on this response and said:

“I think that women should stay at home and do household work; men should earn.”

P1/FG#7, in turn, contributed to the discussion and noted:

“You know it all depends on the difficulties of a family. Sometimes women have to work and help their husbands.”

FG#8 participants had similar sentiments on women’s rights. For instance, P3/FG#8 said:

“In any case, a man is superior to a woman. Man maintains a family; he makes good money and keeps the family intact. For a woman, a family is in the first place than a career. Obviously, the woman should be at home and take care of her husband and kids. In my case, my family does not have such an opportunity. That’s why I have to work.”

P1/FG#8 added,

“Men and women are not equal. For a woman, a family is her life-purpose. For instance, I allow my wife to work, not because I want her money, or her money makes my pocket deep. I allow her to have a job just for herself.”

Participants expressed their ideas on ethnic minorities as well. Both FG#7 and FG#8 participants were against supporting a non-Kyrgyz candidate for the post of president or prime minister. P2/FG#7 opposed the idea, even being, non-Kyrgyz herself, saying:

“It is not right to have a non-Kyrgyz president or prime Minister. This is Kyrgyzstan, so the president should be an ethnic Kyrgyz.”

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46 FG#7: Kyrgyzstanis about to leave to Russia on self-financed work purposes, Osh, 1 August 2018.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 FG#8: Kyrgyzstanis who have come back from Russia after self-financed work visa stay, Bishkek, 10 August 2018.
50 Ibid.
51 FG#7: Kyrgyzstanis about to leave to Russia on self-financed work purposes, Osh, 1 August 2018.
P1/FG#7 and P3/FG#7 disagreed to have a non-Kyrgyz President or any other representative of another ethnicity in high-level positions.

When it comes to the FG#8 participant P4 explained his view as such:

“Even we [he is Uzbek] do not support Uzbek or any candidate who is not Kyrgyz. This is Kyrgyzstan, which should be ruled by [ethnic] Kyrgyz. Uzbekistan is ruled by Uzbeks; Kyrgyzstan is ruled by Kyrgyz.”

P3/FG#8 said that only a Kyrgyz would truly work for the benefit of Kyrgyzstan,

“I think that it is better to have a Kyrgyz President because a President of another ethnicity won’t think and care about the wellbeing of the state. Only a Kyrgyz will truly think about and worry about Kyrgyzstan.”

Working experience in Russia seems not to make these (FG#8) Kyrgyz citizens’ views liberal. They were radically against LGBT rights, did not support gender equality, and did not want ethnic minorities to participate in national politics.

It is, however, important to analyze control groups in comparisons with experimental groups in order to take a more definitive decision on the hypotheses of this Thesis.

**Control groups (Kyrgyz citizens who have never been abroad)**

In the quasi-experimental design of this Thesis, a “control group” is a group of studied Kyrgyz citizens who have never been abroad nor are they planning to do so in the nearest future. Control groups aim to assist in revealing possible shifts in socio-political views of Kyrgyz citizens when compared with those have gone abroad. As with the treatment groups, questions on LGBT rights, women’s rights, and ethnic pluralism were addressed to the control groups (FG#9 and FG#10) as well. As for LGBT rights, all of the FG#9 and FG#10 participants were asked about their reaction if one of their friends were to reject his\her straight sex orientation, and their opinion

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52 FG#8: Kyrgyzstanis who have come back from Russia after self-financed work visa stay, Bishkek, 10 August 2018.

53 Ibid.
on same-sex marriage. Most among the two control groups showed intolerance towards LGBT rights, stating they would probably stop talking and being friends to the person with LGBT orientation. P3/FG#9 adamantly opposed LGBT, adding:

“I would stop having any relations with this person, because it is disgusting, and I cannot explain why.”

P2/FG#9 proclaimed that she would change her opinion about this friend, saying:

“Though I would not stop talking [to him/her], I would ... change my opinion and treatment of this person. Non-traditional is nontraditional.”

P4/FG#9 was dogmatic and was not ready to accept this hypothetical situation:

“If a friend of mine rejected his straight orientation; I would categorically stop talking to him. I find it disgusting.”

Likewise, P2/FG#10 explained her attitude on LGBT rights this way:

“No. I would stop talking and having any kind of relations with this friend. It is inadmissible for me. You have to choose your surroundings. And I think that if you treat LGBT as something normal, it is going to become worse and worse. For sure I am against the legalization of same-sex marriages.”

P1/FG#9, in turn, said of same-sex marriages:

“Of course I would disagree with it. It is disgusting and it will never lead to good results. Discussion of such things is something new for me.”

P2/FG#9 agreed and noted that watching videos of same-sex couples’ videos is not pleasant not to mention about the legalization of same-sex marriages, while P4/FG#9 concluded that: “Legalization of same-sex marriages will make culture become degraded. I would never support it.”

54 FG#9: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Osh, 8 August 2018.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 FG#10: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Bishkek, 26 August 2018.
58 FG#9: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Osh, 8 August 2018.
59 Ibid.
All the control group (FG#9 and FG#10) participants expressed their criticisms on the legalization of same-sex marriages. They did not want to accept or even to discuss the issue further. The debate on LGBT rights thus had a strongly negative tendency for the control groups. All other participants had similar answers, all of them having been against and not ready to support a potential friend with non-straight sexual orientation.

Participants of control groups also discussed women’s role in society. Both groups had similar answers and were divided on the topic as not all considered women and men as equal. P4/FG#10, for example, expressed her opinions on gender equality this way:

“There are many fields where a woman and a man cannot be equal. A woman is superior to a man when it comes to household issues and [the upbringing of] children. Men are superior when it comes to maintaining the family.”

P4/FG#10 thus expressed a traditional point of view; and when she was asked who is superior among the sexes, she answered: “Men are superior to women.”

Three of four participants in FG#9 told that men are superior to woman, and they are not equal. P2/FG#9 noted:

“We are not equal. Males are always superior. I do agree that a man is the head of the family, and he is superior [to women]. I do not like it, however, that even in everyday life men are trusted more than women. For instance, in the family, boys are allowed to do more things than girls, and they [the boys] have more freedom. If a girl has more freedom it does not mean that she is going to break all rules and restrictions.”

P1/FG#9, in turn, said: “I do accept the fact that a man is the head. I am not a feminist and a fan of it.”

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60 FG#10, Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Bishkek, 26 August 2018.
61 Ibid.
62 FG#9: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Osh, 8 August 2018.
63 Ibid.
Further, into the discussion, participants expanded on women’s rights, especially on whether a woman should have the option to work even when she has a large family and her husband earns enough money. Participants were tolerant and mentioned that a woman can have a career, but she has to be sure that their children are fine. They reasoned it as the social order, which goes “from time immemorial,” or as a “family centric” norm, with some participants perceiving the primary role of women in society as being a mother and a wife as a feature of Kyrgyz mentality. Many participants supported a woman’s right of working outside of home.

P3/FG#10 addressed this question as follows: “If she has kids and her husband is rich. What else does she need? She should relax and take care of home, kids and her husband.”⁶⁴ Among FG#10, except for P3, all others agreed that women should try to improve herself and work even not for the purpose of making money. P1, P2, and P4/FG#10 opposed P3/FG#10’s view. P1/FG#10 commented:

“Here the issue is not about money. A woman should work for her own self-satisfaction and personal growth. When a woman does not work [outside of home], she cannot make her husband interested in her.”⁶⁵

Participants in general had a view that a family is more important for women, but, but when the kids are grown up a bit, women should combine work and family. P2/FG#10 mentioned that not having a job and being at home does not exclude women from society. She also thought that a family is superior to a career, or that a woman has to make sure that she is able to take a double burden of family and work:

“I would say that a family is the first and foremost thing for a woman’s life. This idea is inserted in our minds and souls from childhood. Every woman should stay at home and put her family as priority. If she wants to do a career, she has to be sure that she can manage to maintain her family and career at the same time.”⁶⁶

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⁶⁴ FG#10: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Bishkek, 26 August 2018.
⁶⁵ Ibid.
⁶⁶ Ibid.
Control group participants all agreed that the choice of a woman to have a job, when she has many kids, and her husband earns money depends on a woman’s ability to have all of them at the same time.

Control group participants also discussed ethnic minority rights. They were asked what they would do if there was a non-Kyrgyz candidate for the post of President. If in both control groups were a total eight people, five were against supporting the non-Kyrgyz president. P1/FG#9 and P2/FG#9 argued that for them, ethnicity does not matter, but that the level of education, leadership skills, and experience matter more in any candidate who runs for the post of President. But P2/FG#9 provided a qualifier:

“Maybe it is because we are young and we do not know about politics. But for the Kyrgyz officials who run the government, and for the older generation of ordinary citizens, having a non-Kyrgyz president would be perceived as humiliation, and they will never let it happen. It is not acceptable for them.”

P3/FG#9 had the opposite view:

“I am a ‘Nazi’ [on this issue]. Kyrgyz have to rule and govern Kyrgyzstan, and not Uzbek or any other [ethnic group]. Kyrgyzstan should be ruled by Kyrgyz, that is it! Kyrgyzstan is Kyrgyz land.”

P4/FG#9, on the other hand, was ready to support a non-Kyrgyz candidate if he or she is really qualified. In general, opinions were divided on ethnic minority rights. Among FG#10, P1 and P3 concluded that they would support a non-Kyrgyz candidate if having sufficient skills. A non-Kyrgyz candidate meant for them a low possibility of clan politics in running the state. But others in the group disagreed. P2/FG#10 stated: “Having Kyrgyz candidate is better than non-Kyrgyz, especially when they obtain equal skills and characteristics.”

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67 FG#9: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Osh, 8 August 2018.
68 Ibid.
69 FG#10: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Bishkek, 26 August 2018.
“I would agree with him; it is better to have Kyrgyz President. I could hardly support a non-Kyrgyz candidate because it is a question if non Kyrgyz candidate is going to be devoted to the country as Kyrgyz would be.”\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{H\textsubscript{1}: Results}

Based on the data collected, it can be argued that \textbf{H\textsubscript{1}} or the hypothesis that exposure of Kyrgyz citizens to both the U.S. and Russia induces a shift towards liberal norms on LGBT rights, gender equality, and ethnic pluralism cannot be supported for a few reasons. First, not all U.S. exposure raises the liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz participants. The data from the quasi-experimental model used demonstrates that the U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes have a greater potential to affect Kyrgyz citizens’ views on LGBT rights, and ethnic minority rights. Three-quarters of FG\#2 participants (those who have come back after sponsored exchange year in the U.S.) were ready to support same-sex marriages, along with an LGBT friend. All the participants of FG\#2 were also supportive of ethnic minority rights, and did not mind having a non-Kyrgyz president, and other elected officials. However, neither Kyrgyz citizens who have been to the U.S. via Work and Travel programme nor participants of control groups were ready to support LGBT rights, or definitively support ethnic minority rights. If Kyrgyz citizens who have been to the U.S. via Work and Travel programme were critical of women’s rights, and the group dimension was that none of them highly supported a woman’s right to have a job, participants of control groups demonstrated clear supportive views on women’s right for work. Based on the generated data, it can be concluded that self-financed work visa stays in the U.S. do not increase liberal socio-political worldviews.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
Second, exposure of Kyrgyz citizens to Russia does not increase liberal sentiments on LGBT rights, women’s rights, or ethnic minority rights. It does not matter if exposure to Russia is by via sponsored educational programmes or through self-sponsored work visa stays. Kyrgyz citizens who have been to Russia by educational programmes disagreed with the legalization of same-sex marriages even if some were ready to support an LGBT friend. LGBT rights were even perceived as a “national security threat” by some participants. All the participants disagreed to support a non-Kyrgyz candidate for the presidency. The feedback on women’s rights were the same. Not all believed in gender equality, but were ready to support a woman who wants to have a career even having kids and a husband who can sufficiently provide for the household. The pretest and control group participants expressed the same views on women’s rights. Thus, Russian educational programmes have a low possibility to increase liberal socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens. Kyrgyzstanis who have been to Russia on self-financed work visa stays were strongly critical and even radical towards LGBT rights, ethnic pluralism, and women’s rights. Some Kyrgyz labor migrants to Russia were “ready to kill” an LGBT friend, let alone mention same-sex marriage; they were against ethnic pluralism despite half of the participants (FG#8) not being ethnic Kyrgyz. None of the participants of FG#8 believed in gender equality, however, some of the migrants had an opinion that a woman should aspire to have a career path. H₁ is thus only partially supported.

**H₂ and H₃: Results**

The hypothesis (H₂), that Kyrgyz citizens who have been exposed to the U.S. perform a high level of liberal socio-political worldviews rather than Kyrgyz citizens who have been exposed to Russia is also only partially supported. Based on the generated
data of the quasi-experimental model used in this Thesis, the U.S. educational exchange programmes tend to suggest some liberal shifts in Kyrgyz citizens’ worldviews, but this is not the case of self-funded Work and Travel programmes. At the same time, neither educational nor work stays in Russia change or make Kyrgyz citizens’ worldviews more liberal.

As for $H_3$, the hypothesis suggesting that the level of socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyz citizens is higher for those who participated in sponsored educational programmes in the U.S. or Russia as opposed to those who were on self-financed work programmes, this hypothesis can be said to be strongly supported. The data generated showed that participants of educational exchange programmes to the U.S. are, in particular after their return, more tolerant and liberal than those who have been to the U.S. by the Work and Travel programme. In case of exposure to Russia, Kyrgyz citizens after their sponsored studies were more open for discussion of LGBT rights, women’s rights, and ethnic pluralism. Even though overall the participants of Russian educational programmes and self-financed work programs disagreed with rights of sexual minorities, ethnic minorities, and women’s (gender) rights, the level was different. Labor migrants to Russia (in both their pre- and posttest FGs) were radical and critical towards liberal norms, whereas Kyrgyz citizens in Russian sponsored educational programmes, in particular in their posttest FG, were ready to discuss, talk and accept liberal views that were contradicting their own worldviews and sentiments.

**Analysis of $H_4$: Pro-Russian and pro-American sentiments**

$H_4$: The level of pro-American and pro-Russian attitudes, respectively, are not significantly different among those who participated in sponsored educational programmes of the said states as opposed to those who were on self-financed work programmes.
The literature on American and Russian soft power and public diplomacy repeatedly highlights making other foreign nations loyal as the main objective. Nye (2004a) states that soft power of a state works when its culture is attractive to citizens of foreign countries, and thus its political values and foreign policies are seen as “legitimate and having moral authority” (11). The effects of soft power of a state are demonstrated by people’s behavior or attitude to that country. The literature on American exchanges suggests that American exchange programs make the foreign exchange students more positive towards America (Smith 2007; Nye 2004a; Gilboa 2008).

The literature on Russian soft power and public diplomacy states that Russia wants to promote a different kind of soft power as compared to the West (Sukhova 2015), and that Russia along with enhancing a positive image of itself, tends to oppose the liberal norms promoted by the U.S. (anti-American discourse) and “sell the story” of following a unique and different path, as a country that wants to preserve and defend traditional conservative values (Tafuro 2014; Spechler 2010). The literature on Russian public diplomacy and soft power also mentions that the post-Soviet space, thus including Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries, is a priority in Russian public diplomacy activities (Saari 2014; Feklunina 2016). The literature suggested that Kyrgyz exchange students to the U.S. should become more pro-American, and cherish American values and believes; whereas, Kyrgyz exchange students to Russia should possess the positive attitude towards Russia, and have anti-American sentiments.

To test $H_4$, pro-American and pro-Russian sentiments were gauged through the lens of politics. Specifically, all pretest and posttest participants of experimental or treatment groups and control groups were asked about their opinion on the politics
of Russia, the politics of Putin and politics of the U.S. (see Table 2 in Chapter IV).

**U.S. sponsored educational programmes and self-financed work programmes**

The effect of experience in the U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes on political opinions and affinity of Kyrgyz citizens towards the U.S. and Russia was studied in FG#2, while the influence of self-financed work programmes was studied in FG#4. Kyrgyz citizens who have been on sponsored exchange programmes and self-financed work visa stays to the U.S. had different political opinions about politics of the U.S., but both groups were supportive to the politics of Putin, and Russia in general.

Flex alumni, i.e. Kyrgyz citizens who spent a year in the U.S. living with American host families and going to American high schools had a controversial opinion on the politics of the U.S. vs. Russia. In general, they were positive about the U.S. and found the U.S. as a country from whom Kyrgyzstan can learn how to maintain domestic affairs. Based on the responses of FGs, this is due because of the low level of corruption, strict rules, and equal rights regardless of social status in the U.S. Nevertheless, they also found Russia as a defender of Kyrgyzstan. One of the participants (P1/FG#2) even expressed his support to Putin, but at the same time criticized him for failing on domestic issues in Russia:

“Because of him [Putin] we are safe from things as are in Syria. He is protecting Central Asia from ISIS. The United States sees him as an aggressor. But he does not want to lose Russia’s influence in the Middle East either, as the United States does. I don’t agree with his politics within Russia, because a lot of cities are underdeveloped. So he has to pay more attention to his nation, rather than to international issues...”

At the same time, Flex alumni had positive image of politics of the U.S. and Russia. However, they were not able to discuss in detail the developments in the

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71 FG#2: Flex alumni of U.S. sponsored educational exchange programme, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.
world where the U.S. or Russia are involved. Flex alumni admired the U.S.’s domestic politics where they feel that the people are treated equally regardless of ethnicity, race and social status. However, they were also strongly positive about international politics of Russia.

Kyrgyz citizens who have been to the U.S. by self-financed Work and Travel programme were not interested in politics of Russia and the U.S. Nevertheless, they talked about how they felt about the politics of said states. In general participants of FG#4 (those having returned from working in the U.S.) were critical towards politics of the U.S. though they found the U.S. as the place of big opportunities. Participants admitted that it was difficult to earn money in the U.S. and that in reality the U.S. is not an ideal place as many people think. P1/FG#4’s quote may sum of the group’s sentiments:

“I do not know much about politics, but I would say that I like the U.S. You feel that it is a country of big opportunities, but you have to work hard and struggle for a good life. It is not like what the Kyrgyz people think about the U.S. They think that life is so easy in the U.S.”72

P1/FG#4 expanded on her opinion on the U.S. politics:

“The only thing I would say about politics of Trump is that he should not limit people going to the U.S on specific programmes and he does not have to limit the rights of Mexicans, who have already been living there. Right now to bring such a big change would be painful for those emigrants but also for the whole of the U.S. This would also cause a bad image [of the U.S.] in the world in general.”73

Those returning Work and Travel participants to the U.S. were also strongly supportive of politics of Russia. One of the participants liked Putin’s anti-LGBT policies, while others were sympathetic to the overall strong personality of Putin.

P2/FG#4 claimed:

72 FG#4: Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from the U.S. after self-financed Work and Travel programme, Skype FG, 15 September 2018.
73 Ibid.
“In case of Putin’s politics, I do agree with his politics to some point. Russia as a country does not support people with LGBT orientation, and I do agree with him on this point. Putin is a strong leader …” 74

P4/FG#4 and P3/FG#4 also liked Putin as a leader and strong individual:

“I like Putin. He seems strong and intelligent, though I am not aware of his politics, because I study medicine. However, I think Kyrgyzstan and Russia are close to each other in sense of history and culture. And Russia tries to keep a balance with the U.S. in the world.” 75

Based on analysis of the two groups of participants to the U.S. (U.S.-sponsored education and self-financed work and travel), it can be concluded that sponsored educational programmes have more possibility to make Kyrgyz citizens positive towards the U.S. than self-financed work visa stays. Kyrgyz citizens who have experienced working in the U.S. were more focused on challenges and realities of life in the U.S. Though they were not radically anti-U.S. politics, their feedback was not through the rose lenses of the U.S.-sponsored educational participants. The experience of being in the U.S, by sponsored exchanges or self-financed stays with work purposes did not change Kyrgyz citizens’ opinion on the politics of Russia, as Participants of both groups, their pretest versions, and control groups were positive towards Russia and supported Putin’s politics.

Pro-Russian and anti-American dimensions were notable in control groups (Kyrgyz citizens who have never been or intended to go abroad). Six out of eight or three-quarters of participants in the two control groups praised Putin as a strong leader, and saw him as a defender of his people and Kyrgyzstan. For example, P3/FG#10 said:

“I like Putin and his politics. He emits a strong personality. Because of him, we are safe from America. Today, the world is divided into two blocks or alliances. There is America in one pole, and in another is Russia. Russia stands to be a single power that restrains America. As

74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
for America, we see all the bloody politics of theirs [worldwide].”

Control groups were also critical of U.S. politics, with five out of eight participants (or 63 percent) had a negative view, while the remainder, as well, were not pro-American per se, but neutral because, as they claimed, they were not aware of U.S. politics. The involvement of the U.S. in all the many major conflicts and wars in the world received negative feedback from control group participants. P2/FG#10 perceived the U.S. politics as “aggressive” and added: “They try to make the world bend over. And the U.S. enriches its economy because of the resource wars in other countries.”
P2/FG#9 was, in turn, against the U.S. and explained her position:

“USA is blamed for many bloody wars in the world today. Such news have shaped my attitude towards the U.S. I do not support their politics. Moreover, it is told that the U.S. supplies weapons for terrorists.”

Russia sponsored educational programmes and self-financed work visa stays

Participants who have come back from Russia after their sponsored educational stay (FG#6) perceived Putin as a strong leader and agreed with his international politics even when they criticized some internal issues of Russia. All the participants were trying to justify Putin’s actions in the international arena. They mentioned several times that Putin does not have any other choice other than to reply with aggression because of the existing threats caused by the West against Russia. In general, they had a positive feeling towards Russia, and critical of the foreign policy of the U.S. P1/FG#6 was critical about internal issues of Russia as he commented on restrictions in Russia, and the recently implemented law on increasing the age of retirement. However, he noted that he likes Putin and that he thinks that Putin is the reason

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76 FG#10: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Bishkek, 26 August 2018.
77 Ibid.
78 FG#9: Kyrgyzstanis who have never been abroad, Osh, 8 August 2018.
Russia has become a strong state in the 21st century. P1/FG#6 shared his opinion on annexation of Crimea as such:

“In Russian mass media, it is broadcast that Crimea itself expressed its willingness to join Russia. Maybe it is not true that Crimea itself wanted so, but I believe and think that it is true, in any case, that Crimea is the territory that historically belongs to Russia.”

P2/FG#6 and P4FG#6 divided Putin’s politics to the domestic and international. They justified all the actions of Putin.

“Russia has many issues with the development of its regions ... I would say that Putin could not focus on domestic issues because there is an international threat to Russia all the time. Putin has to deal with international issues. When it comes to Crimea, I think he had to do it to ensure national security; it was a strategically important territory for Russia. I think Putin does everything to pursue national interests.”

P4/FG#6 added:

“I agree with the law on retirement because he had to somehow fill a gap in the budget. It was the only alternative. Considering his politics on the international level, Putin is doing a great job! He helps [the country] and does his best to make Russia be one of the leading states in the world.”

Participants of FG#6 also gave their responses as to whether they agree or disagree with the politics of the United States. P1/FG#6 expressed his ideas as such:

“I have friends who study and live in the U.S. All of them tell about how it is great to be there. Yes, there are big opportunities to study, work and simply live. In terms of politics, I am judgmental on the politics of the United States. They interfered into Syria and Libya because of oil. All the wars initiated by the U.S. are because of oil. I see anti-Russian sanctions as unfair. They could resolve these issues in a different way.”

P2/FG#6 held the opinion that U.S. and Russia differed in their view of security:

“First, if we talk about the domestic policy, the U.S. had time to concentrate and resolve all its internal problems. That’s why it seems that in the U.S. everything is done for people. Russia did not have time

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79 FG#6: Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from Russia after Russia-sponsored studies ..., Bishkek, 19 July 2018.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
and opportunity to resolve all its domestic problems ... Considering Syria or Libya, or Iraq and Afghanistan, it might be that [the U.S.] is doing right by sending troops [to those states] from its own point of view and what it determines as security. The U.S.’s point on what is security and threat is different from ours, or Russia’s.”

The educational programmes to Russia indeed make exchange students loyal to Russian politics. Kyrgyz citizens who have been to Russia by sponsored educational programmes became strongly supportive of Russia and the Kremlin’s politics. Such students appear to have found moral authority for all the actions taken by the Russian leader, Putin. Russian public diplomacy comes out to be effective, because as Nye argued that if the policies of a particular country seem to other foreign people as legitimate, soft power of this state is wielded. Likewise, the experience of educational stays in Russia appears to make Kyrgyz citizens strongly supportive of and pro-Russian. The assumption in the literature on Russian public diplomacy and soft power mention that Russia promotes different understandings in politics, such as “sovereign democracy.”

Kyrgyz citizens who experienced self-financed work visa stays in Russia (FG#8) were not open to discussing the politics of either Russia or the U.S. These participants did not have any idea about the politics of the U.S. Their answers on Russia’s policies, particularly Putin’s politics, were based on their own experiences. Discussants of FG#8 were thus more neutral, rather than supportive. They had positive sentiments towards Russia because of job opportunities. P1/FG#8 stated:

“For us, migrants and for Kyrgyzstan, Putin’s politics is good. However, his politics towards citizens of Russia is brutal. Russians suffer, and Putin let them suffer. They have a lot of problems inside their country.”

P4/FG#8 added:

82 Ibid.
83 FG#8: Kyrgyzstanis who have come back from Russia after self-financed work visa stay, Bishkek, 10 August 2018.
“From my point of view, Putin is a good leader. I support Putin because many Kyrgyz earn money in Russia, and have a good life because of their employment in Russia.”

Thus, $H_4$, which stated that the respective level of pro-American and pro-Russian sentiments are not greatly different among Kyrgyz citizens who participated in sponsored educational programmes as opposed to those who were on self-financed work programmes is rejected or only partially accepted. First, participants who have been to the U.S. by educational exchange programmes are supportive of the U.S., far more so than those who had gone to the U.S. via self-financed work programme. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstanis who studied in Russia on scholarship programmes or had worked in Russia are both negative about the politics of the U.S. and strongly supportive of the politics of Russia. Regardless of their purpose in Russia, therefore, Kyrgyzstanis tend to obtain a positive political opinion on the politics of Russia and develop an admiration for the personality of the Russian leader, Putin.

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84 Ibid.
Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

If public diplomacy is a state’s attempt to build a relationship with foreign nations, soft power is, as Joseph Nye (2008) tells us, the obtaining of outcomes one wants through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. In this scenario, exchange programmes between nations are considered to be among the most significant activities of public diplomacy, which potentially wield soft power. Thus, any public diplomacy activities including exchange programs deliver particular messages to foreign people and wield soft power.

Nye (2004a) also defines culture, political values and foreign policies of a given state as the three major resources in which messages can be delivered, and with which foreign people or states can be attracted. During the Cold War, American exchange programs had the purpose of winning hearts and minds by promoting liberal ideas, though the U.S. also often focused on mere opposition to communist USSR’s political and cultural values, at times at expense of promoting liberal norms while buttressing right wing authoritarian regimes. Despite a less than smooth sailing and use of liberal norms during the said era, the end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet Union was still a triumph of U.S. public diplomacy and soft power of norms.

On the other hand, as did the Soviet Union, contemporary Russia perceives U.S. public diplomacy activities in the post-Cold War as a security threat and an attempt to undermine Russia. Hence, the Russian Federation in its public diplomacy also wants to attract foreign citizens by promoting its culture, socio-political values, and foreign policy, which at times follows the discourse of anti-Americanism and countering liberal norms. The Russian Government frames its own “liberal” norms or
political values in a distinctive way from the traditional understanding of liberal norms as understood by the West.

This thesis posed the question on the effect of American and Russian exchange programmes on socio-political views of Kyrgyz citizens who have been exposed to the said states. The literature on American public diplomacy tells us that the U.S. considers itself as the main promoter of liberal norms, and Russia often opposes these same norms. This Thesis analyzed liberal socio-political worldviews (in particular, opinions on LGBT rights, ethnic pluralism, and women’s rights), along with pro-Russian and pro-American sentiments of Kyrgyz citizens. In line with that task, this Thesis attempted to reveal if foreign exchange programmes in the U.S. or Russia indeed cause shifts in socio-political attitudes of their participants or not. A review of literature on American exchange programs (Chapter III) leaves no doubt and often takes it for granted that those shifts (towards liberal norms absorption) do happen. Moreover, the literature also tells of alumni of exchange programmes contributing to the positive changes in social and political lives in their home countries upon return, what, in essence, is the expectations of sponsors of particular exchange programmes. Much of the literature discusses American exchange programmes, in particular, while a gap and dearth of research on the implications of Russian exchange programmes on their target audiences remains.

This Thesis was an attempt to contribute to public diplomacy and soft power studies. The quasi-experimental research design provided an opportunity to objectively observe the influence of cross-border (work or study abroad) experiences of Kyrgyz citizens on their social and political worldviews. Following the principles of quasi-experimental research, I studied and examined socio-political worldviews of Kyrgyzstanis who have been exposed to sponsored exchange programs in the U.S. vs.
Russia, Kyrgyzstanis who have been or were going to the U.S. and Russia on self-financed work visa stays or had been or were going on sponsored educational programmes in the U.S. and Russia, and Kyrgyz citizens who have never been or intend to go abroad (control groups). The reason for including Kyrgyz citizens who have experienced self-financed work programmes and who have never been exposed to any cross-border experience (in addition to those on sponsored educational programmes) were the part in soft power theory which argues that effectiveness and success of a state’s soft power in a foreign country depend on context, level of acceptance and the status of the receivers (Nye 2004a). Thus, the assumption was that those Kyrgyzstanis on sponsored educational programmes in Russia and the U.S. vs. those on self-financed work in the same countries would be affected differently by the respective soft powers of the said states.

After all is said and done, the key findings of this Thesis were the following: Exposure of Kyrgyz citizens to the U.S. and Russia in distinct ways affect both their liberal socio-political views and affinity towards host states. First, sponsored educational exchanges have more potential (as opposed to self-sponsored work and travel) to deliver certain messages that either the U.S. or Russia tend to advocate. Participants of sponsored educational exchange programmes to the U.S. or Russia performed at a higher level of liberal socio-political shift in values than those who have been exposed to the U.S. or Russia through self-financed work programmes, and also much higher than Kyrgyz citizens who have never been abroad.

Second, Kyrgyz citizens who have been exposed to the U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes performed at a far higher level of liberal socio-political shift in values than those who have been to Russia by similar exchange programmes. Third, pro-American sentiments among Kyrgyzstanis are higher for
those who have been to the U.S. via sponsored exchange programmes than those who have been to the U.S. on self-financed work and travel purposes. Indeed, self-financed work and travel participants were found to be far more critical of the U.S. than participants with U.S.-sponsored educational exchange programmes.

Fourth, Anti-American sentiments were strong among Kyrgyz citizens who have been to Russia whether on self-financed work visa stay or sponsored educational exchanges. Fifth, Anti-American sentiments appeared to be significant among Kyrgyz citizens who have never been abroad. And sixth, pro-Russian sentiments are high among all studied groups, however, significantly higher among Russia-sponsored educational exchange students to Russia. Interestingly enough (what could be labeled as the seventh finding of this study), sentiments for or against Russia and the U.S. appear not to be mutually exclusive. Alumni of the U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes, for example, simultaneously hold pro-Russian and pro-American sentiments. However, their pro-American sentiments were not as strong as pro-Russian sentiments of Kyrgyz citizens who studied in Russia on scholarships and grants.

The above findings suggest some practical implications for policy-makers of the U.S. and Russia. The findings suggest that it is worth to reconsider the purpose and objectives of self-financed work programmes to the U.S. since, based on the findings of this Thesis, they seem not to productively promote liberal values for which the U.S. tries to stand for. Indeed, the findings showed that as opposed to Kyrgyz citizens who participated in U.S.-sponsored educational exchange programmes, Kyrgyzstanis who ventured in self-financed work programmes in the U.S. did not experience strong shifts, if any, towards liberal norms, nor did they obtain strong loyalty to U.S. politics.
U.S. policy makers may also want to consider what appears to be the great influence of Russian public diplomacy activities, and the clear pro-Russian sentiments that it induces in its participants. Russian public diplomacy appears to meet its objectives of inducing pro-Russian (and anti-American) sentiments, and its public diplomacy wields beneficial soft power for Russia in Kyrgyzstan. All participants of the studied groups were, for example, supportive of Russia, and treated Russia as a “close” neighbor, “defender” and an “example” to emulated. Sponsored exchange students to Russia were solidly supportive of Russian politics, while they also did not possess the high level of liberal socio-political views on LGBT rights, women’s rights, and ethnic pluralism of their peers who participated in similar exchange programmes in the U.S.

It may also be important for Russia and the U.S. to further engage their respective civil society in public diplomacy activities since the far majority of the activities are government-sponsored and guided. Nowadays, Russian public diplomacy benefits from the personality of Vladimir Putin, himself, however, Russian policy-makers would be wise to start developing new ways to “sell their story” after the end of Putin’s presidency.

This Thesis made an effort to study the effect of work and educational programmes’ exposure to and through the lens of soft power. Further research should be done to properly explain the reasons why different cross-border experiences in the U.S. and Russia product differing outcomes and in distinct ways affect worldviews of their sojourners within the framework and use of political and social psychology theories. It may also be important for further research to indicate the influence of one’s gender, age, and religiosity in transforming the traveler’s socio-political values during cross-national work or study experiences. This Thesis is thus hoped to have
provided a solid ground to entice further qualitative, but also quantitative, research with a greater scope in both the number of interlocutors (large N) and questions posed.
REFERENCES


GoK (Government of the Kyrgyz Republic). 2018. “The State Migration Service Under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic Has Presented the Results of 2017 and the Main Priority Directions of the Migration Policy in the Kyrgyz


**APPENDIX A: LIST OF FOCUS GROUPS**

**FG#1**: Kyrgyz citizen finalists of the U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes, who will likely soon be going to the U.S. via Skype, 11 July 2018.

<table>
<thead>
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**FG#2**: Kyrgyz citizen Alumni of the U.S. sponsored educational exchange programmes, Bishkek, 26 May 2018.

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<td>P4/FG#2</td>
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**FG#3**: Kyrgyz citizens who are going to the U.S. by self-financed Work and Travel programme, Bishkek, 14 May 2018.

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**FG#4**: Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from the U.S. after self-financed Work and Travel programme, via Skype, 15 September 2018.

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**FG#5**: Kyrgyz citizens about to leave Kyrgyzstan to Russia for studies on scholarships or grants, Osh, 8 August, 2018.

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**FG#6:** Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from Russia after sponsored studies. Bishkek, 19 July 2018.

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**FG#7:** Kyrgyz citizens about to leave Kyrgyzstan to Russia with self-financed work purposes, Osh, 1 August 2018.

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**FG#8:** Kyrgyz citizens who have come back from Russia after self-financed work visa stay, Bishkek, 10 August 2018.

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**FG#9:** Kyrgyz citizens who have never been abroad, Osh, 8 August 2018.

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**FG#10:** Kyrgyz citizens who have never been abroad, Bishkek, 26 August 2018.

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