

# Scientific and Educational Cooperation Between China and the Commonwealth of Independent States

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**Abstract**—This article is devoted to analyzing scientific and educational cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The authors consider the importance of such cooperation because education is one of the most effective ways of improving mutual understanding between nations, developing bilateral relations between countries. The CIS countries have a favorable geographical position, large reserves of natural resources and China has a huge economic and investment potential. The cooperation between them is mutually beneficial, and education could promote this cooperation.

**Keywords**—China; scientific cooperation; educational cooperation; the Commonwealth of Independent States; soft power

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is located in the Eurasian continent, its geopolitical position is extremely important. The CIS is important not only because of its geographical location, but also because of strategic resources quantity. According to the experts, Central Asia has the world's third largest oil reserves, surpassed only to the Persian Gulf and West Siberia. It is not coincidental that the world powers repeatedly fought for this region to increase their influence there.

The main task of the People's Republic of China (PRC) foreign policy is to create favorable external conditions for the development of the country. It is extremely important for China to contact with the outside world as the main source of advanced technologies and a market for. China also needs the support of other states in the matter of transforming the existing system of international relations towards greater justice. All of this predetermines China's disinterest in confrontation with the outside world and the impossibility of choosing an aggressive offensive policy towards the overwhelming majority of other states. China elaborated the doctrine of partnerships for cooperation with friendly neighboring countries, primarily with the Russian Federation, later this doctrine started to be used for establishing relations with other states. This is the difference between the policies of China and policies of other states, whose main interests in the post-Soviet space are concentrated in the political and

military-political spheres, which causes the alertness of many national governments.

The PRC pursues a multi-pronged and comprehensive foreign policy, including with regard to the post-Soviet republics. As it was already mentioned, China is focused on creating and developing favorable conditions for its own economic development; this makes it much easier and faster to find common points and areas of contact with those who are concerned about similar problems.

Taking into account security interests, the PRC attaches great importance to the role of the CIS in maintaining the security and strategic stability on the Chinese border and the balance of power in the surrounding regions and the whole world. Firstly, the development of friendly good-neighborly relations and cooperation with the CIS plays an important role in maintaining border security in northeast and northwest China, and in solving border issues. The collapse of the Soviet Union turned the former common borders into the borders of China with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. China needs to develop relations of friendship and cooperation with these countries for maintaining security on its land borders.

Secondly, developing friendly relations and cooperation with the CIS countries plays an important role in maintaining stability in Northeast and Central Asia. After the end of the Cold War, countries of Northeast Asia faced several challenges, such as the nuclear problem on the Korean Peninsula, the revision of the US-Japan security treaty, and the instability in Sino-Japanese relations etc. There are also problems in Central Asia which create instability in the region, and these problems are international terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism. Proponents of "Eastern Turkestan" proclamation from time to time commit terrorist acts in the western part of the People's Republic of China trying to split the state. The western part of China and the countries of Central Asia have a common border and common religion, which is why stability in this region directly concerns China. Finally, friendly relations and cooperation with the CIS countries play an important role in maintaining the global strategic balance of power and increasing China's foreign policy influence.

The CIS will continue to play an irreplaceable role for the sustainable economic development of China from the perspective of economic interests. The PRC can use this base to renew the "Silk Road" and promote the implementation of the development strategy and economic growth in the western part of the country. The CIS has tremendous potential for China's emerging market. Due to its geographical advantages, the CIS provides the broadest opportunities for China: because it is a huge export market for the PRC economy. Most of the CIS countries (particularly, the countries of Central Asia and the Caspian Sea) are rich in natural resources, especially oil and natural gas, and it's also one of the most important regions of the world that make it possible to achieve diversification of energy imports from China.

The CIS remains one of the most important global transportation routes, and it is potentially the most convenient transportation corridor for exporting Chinese goods to European markets. The CIS countries have well-developed transportation systems, including railway, highway, river and sea transport, pipelines, air transport, among which railway transport is the main one. Due to the peculiarities of its geographical position, the CIS is a bridge for the development of geopolitical ties between Europe and the Asia-Pacific region. Accessibility of transport is essential for China's active participation in the global economy.

Regarding political interests, the development of comprehensive cooperation with the CIS countries will increase China's international prestige and foreign policy status.

China seeks to actively cooperate with the CIS countries in various fields. Scientific and educational cooperation is one of these areas. The value of scientific and educational cooperation between states is very high. Education in modern conditions is one of the most effective ways of international communication. It becomes obvious that in the age of globalization, the exchange of information, specialists, research, educational achievements are necessary for the economic and social success of any country of the world [1]. In this article authors will consider scientific and educational cooperation between China and the CIS countries.

## II. RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Russia and China conduct long-standing and fruitful cooperation in the field of education. Today, there are several joint projects and programs in various areas. The countries regularly hold meetings, conferences and consultations. In order to increase Russian-Chinese educational exchange and improve its quality, since 2001 two countries initiated Chinese and Russian universities exhibitions on a regular basis. The usual forms of relations are cooperation agreements, within which there are exchanges of delegations, mutual internships, inviting teachers for lecturing and language teaching, joint conferences, expeditions, student exchanges. Joint educational programs are based on the mutual recognition of the curricula compliance. Recently, the number of foreign

students who wish to get education in China has been growing, and Russians are the fifth largest among them [2].

Russia and China play an important role in the process of the formation and development of network educational projects. Thus, at the meeting of the educational ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states (Astana, October 28, 2008) a number of documents were signed, reflecting the countries common desire to establish the SCO University. The BRICS Network University was created as an initiative of Russia in the year of its chairmanship in this international organization. Both Russia and the PRC are actively participating in these projects in order to create a single educational space.

The interaction of partner countries' universities at the intercollegiate level is characterized by dynamic development. The Russian-Chinese Association of Medical Universities successfully operates, 11 Russian and 18 Chinese universities take part in it. The Association was established with the aim of jointly improving the quality of medical education in China and Russia. In addition, Russian and Chinese educational organizations have expressed interest in creating associations of cultural, philological, aviation and agricultural universities. The Russian and Chinese sides note that the main activities of the two countries' specialized universities associations should be efforts to improve the quality of specialized education, to transform the universities into leading educational, scientific and community centers of their countries in order to develop a system for training scientific and pedagogical personnel.

In order to provide the cooperating universities with organizational and methodological support, the Russian Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry of Education of the PRC signed a Memorandum of Cooperation on the implementation of priority areas in the educational sphere aimed at developing academic mobility, increasing quantitative indicators of bilateral exchanges in the field of education and science, expanding the teaching of Chinese and Russian languages [3].

## III. THE REPUBLIC OF BELARUS

There are more than 120 agreements of direct cooperation between higher educational institutions of Belarus and universities, centers of the PRC. Regional cooperation is well developed between the countries' higher educational institutions. Educational institutions cooperate a lot in the field of scientific and technical developments. The Chinese studies institutions named after Confucius, without a doubt, can be called one of the brightest educational projects between Belarus and China. Cooperation with China is successfully developing in the framework of the activities of three Confucius Institutes: Republican Institute of Chinese Studies named after Confucius, Confucius Institute at the Moscow State Linguistic University and established in October 2014 Confucius Institute on Science and Technology of the Belarusian National Technical University. The new branch of Confucius Institute of Sinology is planned to be opened in Vitebsk. Such branches already exist in Grodno and Gomel. Joint research and education centers

were established in Belarusian universities with the participation of major Chinese investors. Due to such relations in domestic education, there are new trends: schoolchildren begin to learn Chinese from the first class as the main language. In the 2014/2015 academic year, it was the first time that the Republican Chinese Language Olympiad was held in Belarus [4].

#### IV. UKRAINE

The development of cooperation between Ukrainian universities and educational and scientific organizations of the PRC has positive dynamics and good prospects for further growth. One of the promising areas of cooperation is the training of Chinese citizens in Ukrainian higher educational institutions. The practice of creating joint institutions will allow experiencing new teaching methods. Preparation and organization of internships for students, graduate students and young scientists is one of the priority areas of bilateral cooperation [5].

China and Ukraine intend to further expand cooperation in the field of education. The relevant agreements were reached during the second joint meeting of the Sub-Committee on Education Cooperation of the Committee of Cooperation between the Ukrainian and Chinese Governments, which was chaired by China's Minister of Education Chen Baosheng and his Ukrainian counterpart Lilia Grinevich. During the meeting the officials extended the term of the Agreement on cooperation in the field of education. In addition, the parties approved the Plan of activities of the Sub-Committee on Education Cooperation of the Committee of Cooperation between the Ukrainian and Chinese Governments for 2017-2019, agreed to increase the number of training grants issued to both Chinese and Ukrainian students, and discussed the prospects for the third joint meeting of the Sub-Committee [6].

#### V. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

The PRC and the Republic of Moldova are strengthening cultural and humanitarian cooperation. The Confucius Institute, organized by the Free International University of Moldova and Northwest Pedagogical University of the People's Republic of China, successfully operates in Moldova [7]. In an interview in 2017, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of China to the Republic of Moldova, Zhang Yinghun noted: "In the field of education, China and Moldova exchange 20 students every year. Currently, negotiations are underway to sign an agreement on the mutual recognition of academic courses, higher education diplomas, and academic degrees." [8]

#### VI. COUNTRIES OF THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

Active cooperation in the educational sphere is carried out by the PRC and the Republic of Azerbaijan. In 2017 the Ambassador of China to Azerbaijan Wei Jinhua stated: "Education is a priority for China and Azerbaijan". According to him, investment in education always pays off. The Chinese diplomatic mission perceives positively the

Azerbaijan investments in the educational sphere and is ready to assist the development of this area [9].

The educational cooperation between China and Armenia is assessed in terms of projects which the two states are implementing in this area. Thus, Armenian-Chinese School of Friendship was opened in Yerevan in 2018. Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Republic of Armenia Tian Erlun, who attended the opening ceremony, said: "Relations between Armenia and China today retain trends of healthy development. Cooperation in the field of education and other areas is steadily expanding. The number of Chinese learners in Armenia is about 1000 people, and there will be four Chinese teachers in the new school" [10].

#### VII. CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Kazakhstan, bilateral relations have been becoming closer and closer. Mutually beneficial cooperation in different industries between the countries is becoming deeper. Beijing and Astana are strengthening cooperation in the sphere of education. There are student exchange programs between the countries and the interest in each other is growing. In this way, Chinese students are willing to have an additional education in Kazakhstan, and students from Kazakhstan are actively learning Chinese language [11]. Organization of scientific conferences and expert meetings is a platform for developing new ideas on cooperation between the countries [12].

Today, the interest in receiving education in China among the population of Kyrgyzstan is growing steadily. It is caused primarily by the rapid growth of the Chinese economy, strengthening the country's position on the world arena that is a stimulating factor for learning Chinese by business people from the countries cooperating with the People's Republic of China. In this regard the government of China is paying considerable attention to the development of national educational programs abroad, providing significant material support to these projects. In this way, for example, the Chinese leadership in the person of the Ministry of Education of China, taking into account the growing interest in learning Chinese, has launched a program to create special centers later called Confucius Institutes for the expansion of Chinese culture and learning Chinese language. This initiative has been widely developed throughout the world. During the state visit of the PRC Chairman Hu Jintao to Kyrgyzstan on August 10, 2007, a protocol on the creation of such an educational institution on the basis of the J. Balasagyn Kyrgyz National University was signed. The agreement on the establishment of the Confucius Institute was signed with the Xinjiang Pedagogical University which is a partner of the Kyrgyz National University in the creation of this center [13].

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the interest in China and learning Chinese language has been growing among people of the Republic of Tajikistan. This is due to the profound changes of a positive nature that have taken place in bilateral relations because of the joint efforts of the

parties after the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states in 1992. The heads of the PRC and Tajikistan pay great attention to bilateral cooperation in the sphere of education. This topic is discussed at each summit that contributes to solving practical problems in this important area of partnership. Recently, the number of examples related to the expansion of inter-university partnership has been increasing, when Tajik universities establish direct links with higher education institutions in China [14].

Relations with Turkmenistan are of great importance for the People's Republic of China as Turkmenistan is an important element in the realization of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" project. More than 2,000 Turkmen students are educated at universities of the People's Republic of China. In particular, students of the State Medical University of Turkmenistan study at the Peking University of Traditional Medicine, the professors of the universities exchange experience. Students of schools and universities in Turkmenistan learn Chinese language.

In recent years, cooperation between Uzbekistan and China in the sphere of education has been increasingly strengthened. In particular, Samarkand State University is implementing several important projects together with higher educational institutions of China. Many researchers of the university conduct their explorations in educational and scientific institutions of China. The number of students from Uzbekistan who are going to study in China is increasing.

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

Thus, scientific and educational cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Commonwealth of Independent States is actively developing in different fields, such as joint projects in science and education, student exchanges, cooperation of higher education institutions. Students of the CIS countries are interested in studying in China, learning Chinese. They have a possibility to study in Chinese universities of higher education or in Confucius Institutes in their own countries. In turn, Chinese students also wish to study in the CIS countries. What is more, cooperation in science and education promotes mutual understanding between nations, helps to improve bilateral relations between countries. In this regard, it is very important for China to develop scientific and educational cooperation with the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

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