

Higher Education as a Soft Power Tool of State's Foreign Policy

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Abstract—Despite some restrictions caused by the ongoing crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it still seems relevant to say that globalization processes have given rise to a great number of shifts in almost every spheres of life and education does not stand aside. In today's globalized world higher education is viewed as one of the key soft power instruments of many states, including such global giants as Russia and China. Indeed, these countries are trying to advance their national interests and create an attractive image by means of educational leverage, thus shaping the preferences of other states and making them careen in a desired direction. It seems hard to deny the fact that internationalized higher education with its cross-cultural and multi-national exchange programs lays the ground for an intensified cross-border dialogue, contributes to a greater understanding between countries as well as enhances international cooperation. This article examines the role of education as an important soft power tool in the context of increased globalization. What is more, this study provides a comparative analysis of educational soft power tools used by Russia and China. It further focuses on the cooperation between Russia and China based on their educational soft power.

Keywords—education, soft power, foreign policy, Joseph Nye, internationalization, Russia, China

I. INTRODUCTION

Every country endeavors to increase its attractiveness and strengthen its stance internationally in order to ensure long-lasting robust development in social and economic spheres. And to attain these objectives states use a wide range of both soft and hard power instruments. [1] However, given today's burgeoning poly-centric world order, states increasingly draw upon soft power tools due to the rising global interdependence as well as the large cost of applying hard power policies in achieving their goals. Indeed, not so long ago many nations turned to the demonstration of their military capabilities and economic power to prevail on the will of other countries and to coerce them into doing what was needed. Nowadays, however, a lot of countries have come to realize that using outdated hard power coercive methods of ensuring their national security and meeting their foreign policy goals is

fraught with the risk of entailing lots of negative consequences and a hard blow to their reputation.

It should be also mentioned that due to the rapid development of communication technologies and high Internet penetration in many societies, it has become relatively easy for states to apply soft power techniques in order to show the effectiveness of their national policy-making process, attractiveness of state diplomacy and the professional competence of the political elites. [2] All these contribute to shaping a positive image in the eyes of the international community.

According to some scholars soft power rests on the following resources:

- culture in its broad sense that is attractive to other actors
- political values that coincide with the values of other actors
- morally-driven foreign policy that is viewed as legitimate by other actors [3]

Soft power can be therefore projected to other actors of world politics through numerous ways including in particular the use of cultural influence and its components like lifestyle, literature, art, sport, cinematographic, musical events, public diplomacy and of course export of educational services and the system of education and student exchanges because education is considered one of the most important tools for acquiring knowledge, transmitting information and shaping worldviews.

In recent decades the world has witnessed considerable changes regarding higher education due to the development of distance learning technologies, the emergence of the concept of life-long learning, as well as due to the intensive internationalization of education. And with states' soft power becoming a key yardstick in measuring competitiveness on the world stage, it is of great importance for countries to develop the attractiveness of their national higher education systems. Universities, for their part, are interested in promoting their

services internationally trying to gradually integrate into various international research networks. Such higher schools tend to closely monitor international educational trends in order to attract as many students as possible who, after graduating from them, become active agents of knowledge exchange and elements of soft power.

So this paper aims to find out what role plays higher education as an important soft power instrument and to draw a comparative analysis of educational soft power objectives pursued by Russia and China with further focus on the ways Russia and China can enhance their cooperation in terms of using their soft power educational potential.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

It was Joseph Nye who coined the term of soft power in the late 1980s, by which was construed as the ability of one state to change the behaviour of other states by means of attraction and persuasion, rather than coercion or payment. [4]

The idea of soft power was also developed by such scholars as N.Ferguson, S.Lukes, G.Gallarotti and many Russian political scientists like O.G.Leonova, D.B.Kazarinova, O.F.Rusakova, E.M.Kharitonova, M.M.Lebedeva and many others.

The aspect of higher education as a resource of soft power is the focus of attention of such researches as A.Wojciuk, S.L.Talanov, N.A. Zavialova, M.P. Pershina, N.L. Antonova, A.V. Torkunov, D.N. Androsova, N.N. Bolshova and others.

III. THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOFT POWER THEORY

The new millennium is characterized by rivalry between various values and national and socio-economic development models. Nowadays, such leadership can be achieved only by states that advance human development being the cornerstone of the new knowledge-based economy. For that reason a lot of emerging economies like Russia or China endeavor to modernize and internationalize their national education systems. [5] Only such internationally integrated education systems meeting the innovative high-tech economy requirements can be a source of attraction for the most endowed foreigners. And providing educational services to such students is considered one of the most effective soft power tools. [6] That is why in the past 30 years colleges and universities have become widely used in soft power policies by many countries and institutions around the world.

A modernized and internationalized education system as a competitive advantage for the state should:

- meet the basic requirements of the modern economy;
- meet the innovative high-tech economy requirements;
- be integrated into the international educational space;
- be integrated into the international scientific space;
- participate in the world struggle for "minds", attracting talented people.

Education has a strong influence on all aspects of human social life. Indeed, it contributes to the development of the individual and the culture in society, it helps people shape political views, it has an impact on labor force, which is one of the main sources for the development of the economy. That is why it is of crucial importance for every state to understand the essential role played by education as any positive or negative changes in it can lead to progress or regression of social development.

As mentioned earlier, the state's soft power toolkit includes education, since educational and cultural potential is an effective way to influence the world around us. It can be used to address foreign policy challenges, thereby ensuring national security of the state. For that reason education is often used as a soft power tool in the international arena.

By using educational soft power states seek to improve their image abroad and increase their attractiveness. Moreover, they try to attract the brightest scholars, researchers and students from all over the world so that they could conduct study in their countries and then disseminate their cultural values to improve their image in the eyes of both regional and international actors.

Providing educational services to foreign students is one of the most important tools of the state's soft power as educational exchange programs are aimed to improve mutual understanding between peoples of different countries and to develop cooperation and friendly relations between states. By the same token, during their student years, young people shape their worldviews and values. Foreign students from other countries tend to study the language of the host country and learn about scientific advances and cultural heritage. They get acquainted with national customs, traditions, and once back to their homeland with newly accumulated knowledge and acquired valuable social capital and personal relations such inbound students carry the language and culture of the country where they studied. As a result, national education helps states effectively influence the outside world without resorting to military or any other coercive methods. [7]

Many experts who study the process of influencing the target audience of other countries agree that the experience gained by a person while living in the environment of another national culture is extremely useful and valuable. Especially when such influence is directed at the members of the elite circles in another country as it can contribute greatly to shaping future interstate relations. In fact, if such people make a successful career in political, economic, scientific and other spheres in their own country, they are likely to apply much effort to strengthen ties and create cordial relations between their country and the country where they received their education.

But due to the fact there are so many countries and even more universities it can be a very difficult task for students to choose one. Traditionally, in the last two decades while analyzing the attractiveness of universities for potential applicants, first of all they pay attention to their reputation and its position in international rankings as an indicator of educational and scientific achievements. In addition, there are

some important quantitative parameters that should be taken into account:

- country's expenditures on education, research and development and their distribution among universities
- the number of students studying in the country (it can reflect the territory attractiveness and the availability of resources and opportunities for successful development in professional and social life) [8]

Students also take into account other crucial, non academic factors like accommodation cost, visa requirements or the possibility to become a citizen of this country after graduation, the level of tolerance in society and integration prospects. [9]

Speaking of soft power, J. Nye claims that in the information age it is the country that has the better story that wins. [10] And this story is largely formed by all the perceptions and impressions gained during such educational exchanges.

A Greek professor M. Vaxevanidou also views education as a key instrument in a country's soft power toolkit, which can generate a lot of benefits and produce positive results. For example, it can bring commercial values, help to advance foreign policy interests and priorities, as well as bolster economic growth and attract investments. [11]

However, one shouldn't forget about possible negative sides related to the application of education as a soft power instrument. For instance, learning the language and the culture of another country, students may get the feeling of its exclusiveness and even superiority. In these circumstances the acquired cultural identity of students can replace their native one, which can lead to detrimental manifestations such as ethnocentrism.

Or we can take the example of students with completely different value systems, cultural beliefs and attitudes who have to adjust to the new environment thereby experiencing cultural shock. In this case, it can lead to forming the negative image of the country. Abuses, offences, hostile behavior or some racially motivated violence against inbound students can give rise to adverse perceptions as well.

International education can help to create credibility, cross-cultural interaction and understanding as well as build cooperation at the individual, institutional, and community levels producing soft power outcomes for a certain country. However, much depends on the quality of education and also on how students feel in the enrolling university, how they adapt to the existing socio-cultural environment of the host country.

IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL SOFT POWER IN RUSSIA AND CHINA

Educational soft power in Russia. Nowadays, educational entities in Russia spare no efforts in order to increase their competitiveness in world educational markets attracting foreign students who are interested in learning Russian language and culture. The same is true with China which has adopted a very assertive stance over the last few

years on using education as an effective soft power instrument. Back in 2007 in his address to the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China the former President Hu Jintao set out the main principles of Chinese foreign policy with soft power and public diplomacy being the driving force of creating a positive image of his country abroad. And internalization of higher education was outlined as one of the key instruments to enhance China's soft power. [12]

Looking back at the Soviet higher education experience, it can be seen that it was actively used as a foreign policy tool, although there was no such concept as soft power at that time. Traditionally, higher education was one of the key priorities of the state and contributed to the Soviet Union prestige abroad attracting a lot of students from socialist and developing countries. The situation changed drastically with the collapse of the Soviet Union when the number of foreign students dropped significantly. In the first half of the 2000s, Russia's share in the world market of educational services accounted only for about 0.5%. [13] One of the factors explaining the reduction of the foreign students share in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union was the fact that the territory of the state contracted remarkably and the number of universities decreased because some of them were already on another state's territory. Another reason for the decline in the number of foreign students was the reduced attention of the state to higher education. Insufficient funding led to degradation of the educational and scientific capital, as well as brain drain from many universities.

In the 2000s, the Russian state started to focus more on higher education. The number of universities and students in the country was growing significantly in that period during which Russia joined the Bologna process and included education among one of the major national projects.

Today many researchers wonder in which areas and for which countries Russian higher education can be particularly attractive. Geographically the post-Soviet countries come to mind where the Russian language and culture are still holding their positions. Russian higher education is quite competitive in fundamental areas of knowledge, although Russian universities should keep in mind the country of origin of potential students. In Russia, the price/quality ratio (including accommodation cost) is attractive. In some areas the educational potential of Russia is especially strong, in particular in the field of applied mathematics. Russian success in this area is convincingly confirmed by international assessments and statistics on further achievements of the students, including patents for inventions and the research activities results of various institutions. The most popular areas chosen by foreign applicants in Russia include those developed during the Soviet period such as applied mathematics, physics and biology.

In order to develop educational soft power, attract foreign students and increase country's education prestige there were taken some specific measures, including:

- State support. Russian President Vladimir Putin launched in 2005 the national project called "Education" aimed at increasing the "human capital" in

Russia. The project has been implemented at all levels since 2006

- Consolidation of higher education institutions. Since 2007 many federal universities have been established in Russia. Building on the international experience Russia has been merging universities in order to improve the quality of education and get higher positions in international education rankings
- National research University program. Its aim is to select universities that can not only organize an effective learning process but also integrate this process with research activities conducted at the same university
- Project 5-100 with the aim of maximizing the competitive position of a group of leading Russian universities in the global research and education market
- National open education platform. It was launched in 2015 at the initiative of leading Russian universities. The platform offers many online courses of these universities in order to provide everyone with the opportunity to get a quality education

Moreover, in 2007, Russian President brought forward an initiative to establish a "Russian world" foundation. Its purpose lies in the popularization of the Russian language encouraging its learning in Russia and abroad. The "Russian world" foundation organizes a number of humanitarian events and competitions at the local and international level to raise the interest of people in studying the Russian language, culture, and history. Thus, we can clearly see the role of this entity in spreading Russia's educational soft power.

Now the use of soft power in Russian diplomacy has become one of the main foreign policy channels of influence. Russia strives to improve the country's image in the world and there have been established some agencies aimed at achieving this objective. For example, the Federal Agency for CIS Affairs, compatriots living abroad and international humanitarian cooperation (Rossotrudnichestvo) is currently represented in 81 countries by 96 representative offices responsible for issues regarding Russia's soft power.

As mentioned earlier, after the collapse of the Soviet Union the influence of Russian education in the world was significantly undermined, but its leading place in the post-Soviet space remained intact. For Russia, it is of strategic importance to attract other countries citizens to its universities, first of all, it refers to students from former Soviet republics which share a common history and speak Russian. As an educational center of the CIS, Russia has its own strategic goals, namely to ensure sustainable political, economic, social and scientific development in the region, creating thereby favorable conditions for its own interests.

Thus, on the one hand, Russia understands the importance of the soft power of education today and its role in ensuring national interests. It continues to focus its educational resources on developing states especially the CIS countries which account for 36.6% of all foreign students in Russia. The CIS is still considered a sphere of influence of Russia after the

collapse of the USSR and the export of education in this territory is of strategic importance for Russia. To maintain a leading position in the post-Soviet community Russia actively uses its educational soft power offering the opportunity to study at its universities. On the other hand, the CIS is a large market where the demand for quality education is constantly growing. The globalization processes and global integration of education have led to the fact that Russia has serious competitors in the post-Soviet space, primarily the EU and the United States. At the same time, it should be emphasized that Russia has certain advantages such as geographical proximity, openness, accessibility for former Soviet republics citizens, as well as linguistic and mental resemblance. In order to maintain and strengthen its position Russia has much to do in promoting soft power through educational channels.

Educational soft power in China. By the 21st century, China had achieved good results in modernizing its own educational system. In the 90s, with the rapid growth of the economy, China began to actively promote education-related issues, which laid the ground for creating attractiveness China can use now to exert its influence through education.

The country has done a lot of work to develop its education system, which includes:

- Sustainable development of higher education. The number of Chinese universities and the number of students, including foreign ones, is constantly growing. For example, in 1949 there were only 205 universities in mainland China. According to the Ministry of education of China, the number of higher education institutions reached 2914 in 2017 with about 36 million students
- Popularization of teaching. The Chinese authorities are working hard to raise the status of teachers in society. China has always paid great attention to the social status and salary of teachers. China created favorable working conditions for them. By the beginning of the 21st century, China had become a leader in the number of teachers in the country
- Continuous increase in education funding. According to Chinese education laws, the share of education financing in GDP should grow along with the development of the economy
- Education quality improvement. In order for the educational system in China to meet the challenges of the 21st century and to reach high quality education standards the country's authorities are actively carrying out necessary reforms
- Project 211 and 985. Project 211 is the China attempt aimed to strengthen about 100 higher education institutions and main disciplinary areas as a national priority for the 21st century. This project comprises 112 universities. Project 985 is tailored to create elite universities from the 39 universities under the 211 Project. It also focuses on promoting international cooperation and exchange and attracting international students

- C9 League. This initiative launched in 2009 included the initial nine top-level universities from Project 985. Its purpose lies with creating an elite group of Chinese universities, attracting the most endowed students around the world and sharing resources.

In order to establish cooperation in education area China is actively engaged in promoting multilateral and bilateral relations with different countries and their governments, educational bodies and centers and non-profit organizations. The Chinese authorities participate in UNESCO activity and interact with other bodies under the UN, etc. By the 21st century China had signed agreements on cooperation in the field of education with more than 160 countries and regions around the world. Owing to this, Chinese education has become more attractive to foreigners creating an effective channel of soft power through educational programs and exchanges. Moreover, with the introduction of the "One belt and one road" initiative China is likely to involve more and more students in its "soft" sphere of influence.

Indeed, today China's educational policy at the international level includes diverse international exchanges of teachers and students, joint research, and training. The Chinese authorities encourage foreign students to come to China and study there by means of allocating scholarships and grants. It is also worth noting that China also sends a huge number of its students abroad, which contributes to greater mutual understanding and increased international communication.

So China has become one of the world leaders in providing educational services and in order to boost the attractiveness of its image abroad China launched a network of educational centers called "Confucius Institute" with more than 500 institutes operating all around the world. The Institute has become one of the most important steps in the development of China's educational soft power. Its goal is to spread the Chinese language and culture as well as establish good relations between China and other countries. The Confucius institute focuses on:

- Organization of Chinese language and culture courses
- Popularization of the Chinese language and culture through various competitions, conferences, and scientific events
- Conducting a Chinese language test (HSK)
- Preparation and publication of literature on the language and culture of China
- Providing grants, scholarships, internships in China.

There exist three main sources of attraction of foreign students to study in China: 1. Through official channel – Confucius institutes and other state educational programs; 2. Scholarships and financial support from provincial governments and cities of China; 3. State-funded places and scholarships offered by Chinese universities.

So we can see that the Chinese authorities launched a great number of programs related to culture, language, and education and gave them administrative and financial support.

All the efforts aimed to increase the role of the Chinese language and culture outside the country and to create a positive image of China has already borne palatable fruits. J. Nye himself recognized the success of the Confucius Institute claiming that its creation is a good example of the rapid development of Chinese soft power. [14]

Comparison of Russia and China educational soft power policies. Speaking about the soft power in these countries, it can be noted that the strategy of the two powers has many coinciding elements. However, both countries have their own unique features. In the education sphere Russia and China have many common things since many of the members of the Chinese elite once studied in the USSR. As a consequence, China adopted Soviet education model to create its own educational system. The two countries have made a long way in modernizing and developing education and now both are facing similar problems, jeopardizing the effectiveness of their educational soft power.

Among the most damaging problems regarding education system in both countries we can mention the decline in standards of quality education due to the increased marketization of educational services in attracting potential students. What is more, existing problems in education in both countries have given birth to another serious threat, which is "brain drain". It can be explained by the lack of state support, insufficient funding for scientific activities and technology development. So both China and Russia have to address these issues immediately because if the most talented people leave their country, then its education system is unlikely to become attractive for students from other countries.

It should be noted that to solve these problems Russia and China developed similar strategies. They carry out reforms, increase financial support, launch projects aimed to enhance the prestige of leading universities: in Russia it is the 5-100 project and in China – project 211, 985 and C9 League, establish communication and cooperation with foreign universities, participate in international education events, strengthen their positions in the international market of delivering educational services and attract foreign students by providing scholarship and grant support. Moreover, both China and Russia created their own state bodies responsible for promoting educational services, language and culture abroad: the State Chancellery in China and Rossotrudnichestvo in Russia. Similar to the "Russian world" foundation, China established Hanban, or the Confucius institute, which is the main channel for developing educational soft power. In addition, both countries also open cultural, scientific, and research centers in the target countries and offer research trips, educational programs, grants and scholarships.

Thus, we can conclude that there are many similarities in the development of the educational system of the two countries as well as in addressing pressing education issues and in increasing their attractiveness in the eyes of students from other countries.

Despite the similarities existing between the two countries, there are a lot of differences. First of all, the main distinction lies with the historical development of both countries' educational soft power. While Russia built on the heritage of

the Soviet education system, the soft power of Chinese education appeared from scratch. Secondly, due to its stable economic growth, China is ahead of Russia in many respects concerning the use of educational soft power. However, both countries are still lagging behind developed nations in funding education, and as a result, their educational soft power can be undermined. Thirdly, as for international university rankings, Russian education has still much to do. Indeed, the number of Russian top universities in many international rankings does not correspond to the image of an effective provider of quality education. At the same time, China quickly took one of the leading positions in these ratings. Yet, Russia still has a strong scientific basis. Foreigners in Russia study a variety of disciplines ranging from hard to soft sciences. China, in its turn, attracts mainly those who study Chinese in order to develop economic ties with it.

Having examined the main differences between Russian and Chinese educational soft power, we see that both countries have their advantages and disadvantages. But objectively speaking, none of them has been able to fully realize their potential so far, falling behind Western countries in many ways.

V. CONCLUSION

The university education efficiency as a soft power tool can only be measured in the longer term. Culture and values take time to diffuse and take root, but once they do, they remain profoundly rooted for a long time. Making this foreign policy instrument more effective requires patience and hard work. [15] And such work is under way both in Russia and China – two countries actively cooperating with each other on advancing their educational soft power.

Indeed, internationalization and integration of education have already become global trends thanks to which countries have begun to launch joint educational programs and organize some education events. Today, cooperation between Russia and China in this area is actively evolving, as illustrated by the fact that both nations attract more and more students from each other's countries. In recent years our countries have held a number of events dedicated specifically to education, especially the activities carried out as part of the Russia Year in China and China Year in Russia. These events included student festivals, summer and winter courses for students, presentations and exhibitions of educational programs in a neighboring country, conferences on cooperation between universities of the two countries, regular meetings of authorities in the educational sphere, mutual visits of university delegations, forums of university rectors of the two countries, joint training, opening of Confucius institutes in Russia and Russian language Centers in China, etc. Moreover, Russia and China implement a variety of educational programs, including a double bachelor's and master's degree program, joint post-graduates programs and signing of an agreement on creation of an association of higher professional education institutions.

The most striking example in the context of cooperation between Russia and China in terms of strengthening educational soft power is the creation in 2016 of a joint MSU-

BIT University (Lomonosov Moscow state University and Beijing Institute of Technology) in Shenzhen, China. This joint University takes the role of a transmitter of the educational soft power in the Russian Federation and China.

Cooperation is not limited to bilateral projects though. The two countries are developing cooperation in this area in a multilateral format. For instance, there were established SCO and BRICS universities covering a huge educational space. These universities allow the main participants of the organizations — Russia and China — to demonstrate their culture by providing educational services on the world market, including in the SCO and BRICS member-states, as well as beyond their borders. If Russia and China succeed in improving the quality of delivered educational services and promoting national culture, in the future it will give a new impetus to the creation of a positive image of the two countries in the international arena.

Thus, cooperation between Russia and China in the field of education can serve as an example of mutually beneficial relations. The number of Chinese students studying in Russia and Russian students studying in China has drastically grown in recent years. The countries intend to further develop these ties with large-scale plans being elaborated aimed at increasing the number of Russian language centers in China and Chinese ones in Russia.

In conclusion, to use Russian educational soft power in an effective way there can be given some recommendations:

- mass media, including those located abroad, should form a positive image of the country
- translate the main socio-political Russian publications into the official languages of the CIS countries, the Baltic States, as well as Chinese
- hold exams especially in neighboring countries for obtaining an international certificate of the Russian language command
- organize Year of Culture with the CIS, the Baltic States and China
- launch various foundations and non-governmental organizations abroad that will actively export Russian culture and education. In particular, cooperate with schools and kindergartens in the host country
- provide foreigners who are eager to study in Russia with scholarships
- increase funding for programs aimed at supporting Russian diasporas and preserving the Russian identity abroad. The Russian-speaking population that received citizenship of the CIS, Baltic States and China with the financial support of Russian funds could serve as a resource base for Russian influence in the countries of residence
- attract Russian artists in the CIS, Baltic States and China to perform at cultural institutions, exhibitions, symposiums, and conferences

- systematically improve the level of qualification of teachers in the field of cross-national and inter-religious relations [16]
- further develop educational cooperation within the SCO and BRICS organizations

Russian education system has the potential to become an effective foreign policy tool as the Russian Federation built on the heritage of the education system of the USSR. In this respect, significant steps have already been made. Russia is increasing education funding and establishing Federal universities and national research universities, as well as implementing some national projects. So in recent years, Russia has been trying not only to maintain its leading position in the post-Soviet region, but also to enter the world market of educational services. However, despite some success achieved in this regard, it should be stated that Russia as well as China are still falling behind developed Western countries in the field of education.

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