



KAZAKH STUDENTS IN CHINA: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND TRENDS

China has one of the most extensive higher education systems in the world: as of 2017, there were over 2,500 universities with about 38 million students. As the country's role increases in world affairs, China promotes internationalization of its higher education. On the other hand, growing outside interest in the Chinese culture and language is a global trend that confirms the rising political and economic influence of China. Chinese universities demonstrate impressive results in the world university rankings, one of the main criteria of which is the foreign student enrollment. Currently, China is the third top destination for international students after the United States and the United Kingdom. The Chinese government is strongly committed to turning the country into a global leader as the destination for foreign students and pursues the policy of education internationalization. This policy is believed to promote China's international image, enhance the country's soft power and facilitate Chinese investment and business activities abroad. Institutionally, a long-term plan to "go out" for the period of 2010-2020 was formulated for the education sector. As part of the 13th Five Year Plan, China's Ministry of Education tasked the higher education institutions to improve training of personnel, launch outreach programs, increase educational exchanges, and expand scholarships for foreign students.

The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has boosted China's education internationalization efforts. In 2014, the Silk Road Education Alliance was formed with over 100 educational institutions to expand educational opportunities among the BRI countries. In 2016, the State Council of China adopted a five-year plan to expand academic cooperation and strengthen educational interoperability with the BRI countries, including through introducing 10,000 Silk Road scholarships annually. Other measures included educational fairs, exchange programs, and joint educational and research initiatives. As a result of this policy, in 2017, a total of 489,200 foreign students from 204 countries studied in Chinese higher education institutions, a more than 50% increase compared with 2010, including 317,200 students from the BRI countries, or 64.85% of all foreign students. Chinese government scholarships have become a decisive factor that encourages students to study in China. In 2017, 58,600 students from 180 countries (11.97%) studied in China on Chinese government scholarships, while 430,600 international students (88.03%) were self-funded. It is worth noting that government scholarships for foreign students are mostly issued for programs devoted to the study of the Chinese language since China traditionally values its language as a heritage of the Chinese civilization and a key to understanding its culture.

Kazakhstan and China formed a system of intergovernmental educational cooperation following the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to Kazakhstan in June 2003, when the ministries of education of the two countries signed

an agreement on cooperation in the field of education and an agreement on providing 20 million yuan worth educational grants to Kazakh citizens. In 2006, the parties signed an agreement on mutual recognition and equivalence of education documents, degrees and academic titles, as well as an agreement on the opening of the first Confucius Institute in Kazakhstan. The same year, educational grants were also provided to citizens of Kazakhstan to study at Chinese universities within the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In 2009, the 2003 agreement was amended to increase the number of students participating in the annual intergovernmental exchange program from 20 to 100 people.

This change indicated a growing mutual interest for educational exchange, and education in China has become available for Kazakhstani citizens. In addition to the Chinese side's efforts to improve access to information about studying in China, Chinese universities started to advertise themselves at schools and higher education institutions in Kazakhstan and accept Kazakh students based on a high school diploma, without demanding a Unified National Testing certificate. As more and more Kazakhstani students preferred to get higher education in China, a number of companies appeared acting as intermediaries between Chinese and Kazakh universities and providing services to applicants. Today, the top three of these companies include "My China", "Your China" and "China Study". As a result, since 2008, Kazakhstan is among the top 10 countries sending students to China, along with South Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, the United States, India, Russia, Japan, Indonesia and Laos.

During the last decade, the number of Kazakh students in China has increased year by year. In the 2003-2004 academic year, only 20 Kazakh students studied in China under the intergovernmental exchange program. After signing the above mentioned agreements, the number of students from Kazakhstan in all types of programs (governmental, corporate, self-funded) began to increase dramatically and reached 7,874 in 2010. Then, the number continued to rise: 8,287 in 2011, 9,657 in 2013, and 11,764 in 2016. According to the Ministry of Education of China, there were 17,600 Kazakh students registered in China in 2018. Students from Kazakhstan mainly study technical disciplines such as oil exploration and extraction, engineering, construction and transport, as well as social sciences.

Thus, the educational migration from Kazakhstan to China shows continuous growth dynamics. Along with the availability of scholarships and China's economic boom, Chinese education has become attractive for Kazakh youth for a number of other reasons. According to the 2015 survey of Kazakh students studying in China made by domestic researchers, 49.6% of respondents indicated comfortable study conditions created for foreign students in China (visa support, good dormitories, emergency support, etc.), as the primary reason to

choose China. The second important factor mentioned by 45% of respondents is the affordable cost of Chinese education and low living expenses. 41.8% of students believe that Chinese education is of higher quality, and 39.1% consider it to be prestigious. 29.5% won Chinese scholarships, while 26.5% explain their decision to study in China by affection to the country, its culture and way of life. 25.6% followed recommendations of their friends, and 24.3% were attracted by level of security in China. The geographical proximity to Kazakhstan was one of the factors in favor of China for 23.8% of respondents.

Regarding Chinese educational institutions preferred by Kazakh students, it should be noted that they do not always choose the leading universities of China. Often they choose regional universities that are geographically close to Kazakhstan, as well as universities where requirements for foreign students are not so strict. The majority of Kazakh students study in large Chinese cities such as Xi'an (32.2%), Beijing (20.9%), Shanghai (7.4%), Guangzhou (4.3%), Lanzhou (3.1%), Urumchi (2.9%), and Dalian (2.2%). Currently, five Confucius institutes operate in Kazakhstan: two in Almaty and one in each of Nur-Sultan, Karagandy and Aktobe. These institutes offer Chinese language courses, which allow students to pass China's HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) state exam for the certification of proficiency in the Chinese language, which is necessary to pursue higher education in China.

In conclusion, the development of educational ties between Kazakhstan and China is a natural process resulting from the dynamic development of China-Kazakhstan political and economic cooperation, as well as growing people-to-people communications. For China, education internationalization is one of the ways to enhance the country's international reputation and to provide an alternative to the Western system. For Kazakhstan, interaction with Chinese universities helps to expand academic mobility and research collaboration opportunities, as well as to supply the country's labor market with qualified specialists in various fields. It remains to be seen if recent developments in Xinjiang will reduce the number of young people wishing to study in China. For now, Kazakh students make a pragmatic choice when opting for higher education in China as the main incentive for them is relatively high quality and affordable, or even free, education offered by Chinese universities. They are also attracted by a possibility of employment in this economically powerful country that strives to become a global leader. This could become a significant challenge for Kazakhstan in future in terms of a possible brain drain. Therefore, Kazakhstan should use educational cooperation with China to modernize its national higher education system, improve its quality and make it more appealing for own secondary school graduates.

Written by Azhar Serikkaliyeva,
Eurasian Research Institute, Kazakhstan

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The defense ministers of the SCO member states met in Bishkek to exchange views on matters of international and regional security and on strengthening mutual defense and security cooperation. The parties stressed the importance of implementing the 2018-2019 cooperation plan between their agencies and approved the cooperation plan for 2020-2021.
- The 16th Ministerial Meeting of the member states of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) was held in Doha. The participants discussed ways to promote interdependence between Asian countries aimed at achieving integrated economic growth through sustainable strategies and improving the competitiveness of Asia at the global level. Turkey will assume the ACD chairmanship from Qatar in September 2019.
- The political consultations between Turkmenistan and the United States were held in Ashgabat. The delegations discussed issues of mutual interest, including the efforts of the two countries to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan and assist its economic development. The parties emphasized the importance of cooperation within the regional C5+1 format for expanding intra-regional relations in Central Asia.
- The working groups of the Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan intergovernmental commission on delimitation and demarcation of the state border held their regular meeting in the Uzbek city of Urgench. During the talks, the parties reviewed the results of joint field topographic and geodetic works, summarized the land balance calculation, and prepared a draft demarcation line at separate sections of the border.
- The 11th review meeting of the parties to the memorandum of understanding on sub-regional drug control cooperation in Central Asia was held in Tashkent. The representatives of the five Central Asian states, Azerbaijan, Russia, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the Aga Khan Development Network discussed ways to strengthen regional cooperation in combating the illicit trade in narcotic drugs.
- During his working visit to Uzbekistan, Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov met with his Uzbek counterpart Abdulaziz Kamilov and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to discuss bilateral and regional issues and exchange views on major international topics. The parties paid special attention to the interaction of Uzbekistan and Russia on inter-Afghan peace talks and the socio-economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan.
- The foreign ministries of Iran and Kyrgyzstan held the fourth round of bilateral political consultations in Tehran. The meeting focused on a wide range of issues related to bilateral and regional cooperation. The parties also discussed ways to strengthen ties between the two countries, including easing the visa regime and establishing direct flights between Tehran and Bishkek.

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The prime ministers of the EAEU member states attended the meeting of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council held in Yerevan. The parties discussed issues related to the expansion of mutual trade and economic relations, including the elimination of existing barriers within the EAEU internal market, the mechanisms of deepening cross-border cooperation, and the development of a digital trading ecosystem.
- The third meeting of the Kazakhstan-Hungary Strategic Council was held in Nur-Sultan. The parties discussed prospects for expanding political dialogue and intensifying trade, economic, cultural and humanitarian cooperation. During the bilateral business and investment forum, Hungarian businessmen learned about Kazakhstan's investment opportunities and export potential, including in agriculture, light, food and chemical industries, construction, and machinery.
- KazTransGas, Kazakhstan's national gas supply operator, resumed the transit of the Turkmen commercial gas through the country's territory to Russia via the Central Asia-Center gas pipeline. The daily volume of the Turkmen gas transported via the pipeline is 15 million cubic meters, and more than 220 million cubic meters of gas have been transported since the resumption of the transit.
- The preliminary data from the joint exploration of promising hydrocarbon fields on the Ustyurt plateau by BP and Uzbekneftegaz show signs of commercially attractive reserves in one of the fields. BP is also interested in exploring other fields in Uzbekistan in order to determine the possibility of organizing gas production in industrial volumes.
- According to an updated evaluation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Uzbekistan made significant progress in increasing the openness of budget data and streamlining the government finance statistics. The country improved its performance against the IMF Fiscal Transparency Code standards and now meets 23 of the code's 36 principles, compared to 16 in the previous assessment conducted in June 2018.
- During the 14th International Defense Industry Fair 2019 held in Istanbul, Kazakhstan ASELNAN Engineering, a daughter company of Kazakhstan Engineering, signed an agreement on exports of optoelectronic devices to Turkey. According to the Kazakh Ministry of Digital Development, Defense and Aerospace Industry, five Turkish companies are expected to visit Nur-Sultan to hold talks on joint projects in the defense sector.
- Following the requirement of the Russian Central Bank concerning shadow transactions, three major money transfer systems, Western Union, Zolotaya Korona, and Contact, introduced restrictions on the amount of remittances from Russia to certain countries. The monthly limit is set at 100,000 rubles for China, Kyrgyzstan and Vietnam, and at 150,000 rubles for Kazakhstan.

Society and Culture

- President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev met with President of the International Turkic Academy Darghan Kydyrali, who briefed the head of state on the academy's activities. In particular, the conversation touched upon preparations for the upcoming international forum dedicated to the Great Steppe civilization. The event will take place in Nur-Sultan under the auspices of UNESCO.
- The UNESCO Executive Committee approved the proposal of the UNESCO National Commission of Turkey to dedicate the year 2020 to the 1300th anniversary of the Tonyukuk inscription memorial. The proposal was backed by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia and Uzbekistan. The inscription is a first-person narration, which researchers believe was written by Turkic political and military advisor Bilge Tonyukuk.
- President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan officially inaugurated the country's largest mosque built on Istanbul's Asian side. The Camlica Mosque Complex, with a capacity to accommodate 63,000 worshippers, combines Ottoman and Seljuk architectural styles. The previous Turkish record holder in capacity was the Sabanci Central Mosque in the southern province of Adana that can host 28,500 worshippers.
- The World Book and Copyright Day was solemnly celebrated at the Republican Library for Children and Youth in Bishkek. The main purpose of the event held under the motto "A reading child is a prosperous Kyrgyzstan" was to attract children to reading. To generate young readers' interest, the organizers conducted theatrical performances, games, quizzes and other intellectual activities.
- In celebration of the International Girls in ICT Day, UNDP Kazakhstan and the team of developers launched a Telegram application called "GenderBot" aimed at raising awareness about gender equality and the rights of girls and women. The bot offers access to the gender dictionary, displays gender statistics of Kazakhstan and contains contact numbers of crisis centers all over the country.
- According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, as of January 1, 2019, the population of Georgia was 3,723,500 people, decreasing by 0.2% year-on-year. While the natural increase was positive (4,614), the net migration was negative (-10,783). There are more women (52%) in Georgia than men, and the urban population (58.7%) exceeds the number of rural residents.
- As part of a newly launched state program for biodiversity recovery, Georgia will start the restoration and development of the Krtsanisi forest park, which is located near Tbilisi. The park, spread over 210 hectares, has a unique ecosystem, but the negligence of authorities and public in recent years has resulted in the decrease of its green cover.