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Educational Migration from Kazakhstan to China: Reality and Prospects

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Introduction. The relevance of the study is determined by the gradual expansion of educational cooperation between Kazakhstan and China and the need to identify the competitive advantages of the educational system of China over Kazakhstan's system of higher education. The purpose of the article is to identify factors stimulating dynamic growth of educational migration from Kazakhstan to China, as a relatively recent phenomenon, and to evaluate its possible consequences.

Materials and Methods. In order to identify main trends and the way of development of Kazakhstan-China educational relations, we used empirical methods; namely: qualitative research method, description, expert interviews, content analysis, and synthesis. A survey of Kazakhstani students studying in China was conducted. The students of the Department of Chinese Studies of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University were interviewed, as well as those who participated in the joint training program with the Lanzhou University. Kazakhstani students from Beijing University of Language and Culture also participated in the survey.

Results. The main reasons for the dynamic growth of educational migration from Kazakhstan to China are high quality of education in China, access to education in Chinese universities, comfortable learning and living conditions for Kazakhs, etc. By analysing the statistical data of the Chinese Ministry of Education, timing of the dynamics of Kazakhstani students' flows to China was presented. The legislative and governmental measures of the two countries aiming to create a basis for educational cooperation were also analysed. An attempt to predict the future activities of Kazakhstan students as the "soft power" of China in Kazakhstan was made.

Discussion and Conclusion. This problem can be further investigated in the study of factors affecting the increase in the academic mobility of Kazakhstani students, which should contribute to the expansion of cooperation between Kazakhstan and China in the field of education. The results of this study may be useful to scientists and lecturers engaged in research on various aspects of the educational migration of Kazakhstan to China.

Keywords: education, student, China, Kazakhstan, academic mobility, internationalization

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Образовательная миграция из Казахстана в Китай: реальность и перспективы

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Введение. Образовательная миграция является одним из наиболее значимых трендов глобализации. Актуальность исследования определяется постепенным расширением образовательных контактов Казахстана и Китая и необходимостью выявления конкурентных преимуществ образовательной системы Китая перед национальной системой высшего образования Казахстана. Цель статьи – выявить факторы, стимулирующие динамичный рост образовательной миграции из Казахстана в Китай как относительно недавнего явления, и оценить ее возможные последствия.

Материалы и методы. С целью выявления основных тенденций и развития казахстано-китайских образовательных связей исследование проводилось на основе сбора информации путем экспертных интервью и анкетирования, а также ее детальной обработки и контент-анализа. В анкетировании приняли участие казахстанские студенты, обучающиеся в Китае, казахстанские студенты Пекинского университета языка и культуры, опрошены студенты кафедры китаеведения Казахского национального университета, а также принимавшие участие в совместной программе обучения с Ланьчжоуским университетом. Выборка составила 72 человека.

Результаты исследования. Выявлены основные причины динамичного роста образовательной миграции из Казахстана в Китай, такие как высокое качество образования в Китае, доступность обучения в вузах Китайской Народной Республики, комфортные условия обучения и проживания для казахстанцев и др. Путем анализа статистических данных Министерства образования Китая была представлена хронология динамики роста казахстанских студентов в Китае. В статье впервые проанализирован растущий спрос на образование в Китае среди казахстанцев в качестве тренда, влияющего на возрастание «мягкой силы» Китая в Казахстане в перспективе.

Обсуждение и заключение. Данная проблематика может получить свое развитие в дальнейшем исследовании факторов, влияющих на повышение академической мобильности казахстанских студентов, что должно способствовать расширению сотрудничества Казахстана и Китая в сфере образования. Результаты этой работы могут быть полезны ученым и преподавателям, занимающимся исследованиями различных аспектов образовательной миграции Казахстана в Китай.

Ключевые слова: образование, студент, Китай, Казахстан, академическая мобильность, интернационализация

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Introduction

International student mobility is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon in higher education worldwide. The dominant trend of the past few years was the growing flow of students from developing countries to universities in the West, primarily in the United Kingdom and the United States. Currently, China is the third top destination for international students after the above-mentioned countries. Growing outside interest in Chinese education and language is a global trend that confirms the rising political and economic influence of China. Modern China has one of the most

extensive higher education systems in the world. As the country's role increases in world affairs, China promotes its international higher education and targeting the goal to become a leader in the global higher education system. This article analyses the aims and process of the Chinese higher education internationalization and its impact and trends on educational cooperation with Kazakhstan. Therefore, the study reveals outcomes of China's recent educational policy through the case of Kazakhstan, as a country with a dynamic influence among the other involved states. The authors analysing current prospects in academic



mobility between China and Kazakhstan, evaluate governmental policies of these two countries in educational cooperation.

Education is at the roots of human resources, cultural exchange, talent, innovation, and think tanks. To enhance the potential of many of these, China has several plans. China made major strides in providing universal education, with compulsory primary and secondary education making major progress. Chinese universities demonstrate impressive results in the world university rankings, one of the main criteria of which is high foreign student enrolment. As of 2017, there were 2,914 universities and colleges¹ with about 20 million students in Higher Education². 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 [1]. This policy is believed to promote China's international image, enhance the country's soft power and facilitate Chinese investment and business activities abroad. By 2020 China plans to take second place in this ranking, with the United States in the first place [2]. As a part of the drive to expand educational opportunities across the world, a number of outreach programs have been launched by China. Institutionally, a long-term plan to "go out" for the period of 2010-2020 was formulated for the education sector. As a part of the 13th Five Year Plan, China's Ministry of Education had tasked the HEIs to enhance the training of personnel in expanding the educational system, enhance scholarships for foreign students and increase people-to-people contacts to promote international educational facilities.

The goal of this paper is to identify the factors that stimulate the educational migration of the two countries in the field of education and their consequences as China's soft power enhance and educational

migration dynamic growth. Study migration implies training in a higher or secondary vocational institution abroad in order to obtain a specialty, including preparatory language courses for admission to universities. The main objective of this study was to understand the motivations that drive the internationalization of higher education, which guides Kazakhstan students, on the one hand, and the Chinese government, in every way encouraging a surge in students from Kazakhstan to Chinese universities, on the other. The main question, or rather two interrelated research questions, can be formulated in the following form: To what extent and why is China interested in attracting students from Kazakhstan? And to what extent and why is Chinese education attractive for Kazakhstani students? What is the impact of China education as a soft power on Kazakhstani students?

As for Kazakhstani students seeking to get their education at universities in China, the main incentives for them are the pragmatism of choice under conditions of relatively high quality and affordable prices, and sometimes free access to programs, and more important, the possibility of post-graduate employment in framework of the spreading powerful economic system of a country that claims to be a regional, and over time, possibly global leader.

Literature Review

The topic of international student mobility in China attracts the attention of scientists. Terming internationalization of education as the national interests of any country, researcher at the Chinese Academy of Educational Sciences Bi Cheng, argued that China is pursuing this policy as a part of enhancing its comprehensive national soft power: "...the larger picture is that education is a bridge with the world and also builder of the world order..."³.

¹ Ministry of Education of the P.R.C [Electronic resource]. Available at: http://www.moe.edu.cn/srcsite/A03/moe_634/201706/t20170614_306900.html (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Eng.)

² Ministry of Education of the P.R.C [Electronic resource]. Available at: http://en.moe.gov.cn/Resources/Statistics/edu_stat2017/national/201808/t20180808_344698.html (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Eng.)

³ Cheng B. [OBOR Strategy Brings New Opportunities to China's Education] [Electronic resource]. China Education News. Available at: http://www.jyb.cn/Theory/lltw/201510/t20151009_639192.html (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Chinese)

Internationalization of Chinese HEIs is also a contribution to the Western model-based educational system, which is providing an alternative view to the global academic regularity and has a great impact both on Chinese image and facilitate further internationalization of Chinese investment and business activities abroad. Such exchanges and cooperation are in the interests of China as these will enhance its international competitiveness and provide legal protections, norms and guidance [3].

So in “International Student Mobility (ISM) in China in the New Phase of Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE): Trends and Patterns” by Ewnetu H. Tamene, Lou Shizhou, Wan Xiulan [4] details of these trends in China from 1990 to 2015, as well as reforms that have helped stimulate their development, are described.

Researchers identify three periods in the dynamics of these trends: 1991–2000 is the decade of the political plan/roadmap, from 2001 to 2010 – a decade of recognition and understanding; from 2011 to 2015 – the formation of a new role and the influx of students. The conceptual basis for this study lies in the idea that the internationalization of higher education is a process and strategic effort as a response to the impact of globalization, as already it was mentioned by Huang [5], Qiang et al. [6], Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado [7], Petruk [8] and meets the needs of the national/local community. The authors rightly argue that international student mobility is an integral part of the internationalization and globalization of education.

Ewnetu H. Tamene and Lou Shizhou go further towards the definition of internationalization values, as an issue that is becoming more and more persistent agenda for the developing countries [9]. Those countries are faced with a massive desire of young people to go to study abroad and to work in foreign countries, which has a negative impact on the economy and society of their national states with regard to the possibility of their successful development. In higher education, there is a shift from academic, cultural/social justification to business and commercial orientation. Prag-

matic motivations are intensified due to the lack or substantial reduction in funding and an increase in institutions financed largely by private sources. Because of this pressure or economic motivation, internationalization becomes a matter of commercial gain. Values such as cultural enlightenment, responsiveness, and critical knowledge fade into the background under pressure from commercial and business landmarks based on skills that are necessary for finding profitable work. At the same time, higher education institutions in many countries are state-owned products and remain embedded within national higher education systems as an essential factor for economic productivity and competitiveness [10]. Internationalization must be a policy for strengthening local and global research networks, sharing knowledge, improving academic quality and ensuring fair education. This opens up opportunities for students to meet their needs and interests around the world. This discussion revolves around the central role of education, whether education will remain a public good and social responsibility in the sense of promoting the development of society, or it is perceived as a private good for the consumption and benefit of people.

There are many reasons for academic mobility, including the processes of globalization that led to the opening of borders, which in the past were problematic enough to cross, the low level of education in the countries of students’ origin, increased ambitions and financial opportunities of the middle class, the purposeful policy of some states to raise the level of human resources to help ensure economic growth and improve national educational standards, international rankings, etc.

As for the host countries, the flow of foreign students brings them tangible financial investments. More recently, the Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International Pathways of Great Britain have calculated that the profits received from international students equal £20.3 billion, which is 10 times more than the costs [11].

However, the contribution of foreign students should not be assessed in monetary



terms only. International experts recognize that foreign students positively influence the social and cultural diversity of the youth environment, bring new research ideas and experience to Master and PhD programs, and help strengthen international partnerships [12]. Benefits are numerous after their graduation too, as most students return home, but continue to maintain friendly, scientific and creative ties with their universities, becoming conductors of the soft power of the country where they received their education⁴.

The main suppliers of students to foreign universities are China and India. It is expected that by 2027 the number of Chinese students studying abroad will increase by 245,000 and reach 1.46 million; the number of Indian students will increase by 185,000 and reach 439,000. These two Asian countries will provide 60% of the global growth in outgoing students until the year 2027 [13].

However, the number of countries competing for the placement of foreign students is growing every year, although, according to the forecasts of the British Council, the increase in the number of students leaving for study abroad in the next decade will significantly slow down. Even if new studies show that the number of outgoing students around the world will increase by an average of 1.7% per year over the next 10 years, this will be a significant slowdown compared to the period between 2000 and 2015 when the annual growth rate was 5.7% [14]. The decline in growth rates is due not only to the deterioration of the political climate in the United States and European countries, but also due to a large extent to the increase of local investments in higher education in many countries. Many potential students now want to study in their home countries, and the greatest decline in absolute terms is expected to be in South Korea and Malaysia.

In this regard, another interesting and important trend is emerging – a significant improvement in the quality of higher educa-

tion in the last few years not only encourages youth to stay in their home countries, but also prompts students at the regional level to choose cheaper education, which is of similar quality. The preoccupation of developing countries with strengthening their higher education systems allows them to begin a gradual transition from a group of countries that have sent students abroad to a group of countries that accept foreign students. First, this applies to the countries of Asia.

As of 2015, Asian countries sent about 2.3 million people to study abroad and attracted only 928,977 foreign students to their universities. Some of them decided to change this imbalance, aiming at dramatically increase of the number of foreign students between 2020 and 2025. It is assumed that China, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Malaysia will become leaders in attracting students from neighbouring countries to their universities, and if their plans are implemented, about 1.4 million international students will be distributed within the Asian region within less than ten years. This will prevent brain drain, keep students close to home and, as a result, strengthen regional economies [15]. It is worth noting that, as experts predict, by 2050 the top 25 countries in the global ranking of the world's largest economies will include 14 Asian countries.

Materials and Methods

The study uses a qualitative research method that seems to us most suitable for finding answers to the questions posed. We have interpreted the data collected as a result of monitoring the processes and inductive analysis of the situation and context within our own work practices. In this sense, our research can be considered as an insider research. At the same time, the authors inevitably experience social and cultural influences, although they are in a favourable position to study in depth a specific issue and with a particular knowledge of this problem. These features of

⁴ British Council. Global Student Mobility Growth 'to Dwindle Over Next Decade' [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/global-student-mobility-growth-dwindle-over-next-decade> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Eng.)

insider research were indicated by Costley C., Elliott Geoffrey C., Gibbs Paul in the “Key concepts for the insider-researcher” work [16].

In addition to insider knowledge, the authors have access to people and information that can further expand this knowledge. Therefore, several semi-structured interviews were conducted with students of Chinese universities from Kazakhstan during a brief trip by one of the authors of the study to Lanzhou University in June 2016 and Beijing University of Language and Culture in July 2018, during which they interviewed and analysed academic mobility from Kazakhstan.

The research methodology is based on the integrated use of qualitative (expert survey, observation: 60 experts were polled in total) of information collection methods. The selection of respondents was carried out by the “snowball”. Citizens of Kazakhstan who study in China for undergraduate, graduate, doctoral, preparatory courses for admission to universities were selected. Survey method: combined (Face-to-Face - interview), telephone survey and e-mail survey. For an interview, questions were formulated on how students got information about studying in China, the purpose, plans, attractiveness of studying in China, opinions about Chinese education, specialty, etc. Semi-formal interviews were conducted with students, 72 students were interviewed in total.

In the course of the work, we studied the articles and reports of a number of international educational organizations and analysed the statistical data of international agencies. It should be noted that the survey sample does not claim to be representative, but together with the qualitative research methods (observation, expert survey) allows to explore fully the topic under study. The survey also included interviews with teachers, staff of international departments of Kazakhstani and Chinese universities, diplomats in charge of education and culture of bilateral relations; Kazakhstani people who have graduated from Chinese universities and working both in their homeland and in other countries. Analysis of the government legislations as speeches

of officials of the two countries, press articles, statistical data of the Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and the Embassy of the PRC in the RK, the Ministry of Education and Science of the RK, the Ministry of Education of the PRC supplemented the picture that emerged from the results of interviews and surveys. Secondary data sources were books, reports, Chinese government scholarship and Ministry of education and BRI official websites. The result of the study is a generalization that arises from a specific context. It is useful for community practice, and it can have an impact at the national, regional and local levels, influence policy and decision making, and can also influence individual practice.

Results

China has a chance to increase significantly the number of foreign students by embracing those who do not have an opportunity to study in North America, Australia or Europe since Chinese education is much cheaper and therefore more affordable. In addition, experts note a notable improvement in the quality of higher education in China due to the government’s consistent reform efforts [17]. As part of recently completed Project 985 alone, China’s universities received 451.2 billion yuan (\$68.8 billion) from the central government and local authorities. It is worth noting that the Chinese scientific sector has received strong financial support from the government, especially for fundamental scientific research, which is essential for the technological development of the country.

China’s ‘C9’ institutions have the resources, government support and intent to achieve global elite status. This will drive new partnership opportunities and new sources of competition for Western universities [18].

The C9 League is an alliance of nine top universities, analogous to the Ivy League Universities in the United States. The members of the C9 League are Fudan University, Harbin Institute of Technology, Nanjing University, Peking University, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Tsinghua University,



University of Science and Technology of China, Xi'an Jiaotong University, and Zhejiang University. Together they account for 3% of the country's researchers but receive 10% of national research expenditures. They produce 20% of the academic publications and 30% of total citations⁵.

It should be noted that according to the World University's Rankings 2019 China's Tsinghua University showed a rapid advance in the ranking this year. It not only overtook the National University of Singapore as the best institution on the Asian continent, taking the 22nd position, but also increased its scores in all three international indicators: the share of foreign students, international staff, and international research cooperation. In general, Chinese universities have significantly improved their teaching and research reputation. China's top-10 universities have higher average reputation scores than the most effective institutions in France and Australia. Experts believe that the main factor that has contributed to the rise of China's universities is their improved publication and citation performance in such disciplines as industrial and civil construction, space research, and big data.

Internationalization, along with adequate funding, is also often a key to improving not only an institution's position in the world university rankings, but also its overall efficiency [19].

The higher education in Kazakhstan enjoys the high status among the young people and the number of students in different years after independence changed significantly, which was due to the opening of a large number of private universities. However, after a sharp surge, the number of students gradually stabilized, and gross enrolment in tertiary education of the population of typical age (18-22 years) in the last five years in Kazakhstan, for example, has increased from 53.14% in 2011 to 54.29% in 2017 going through a decline in a number

of years. The contingent of higher education institutions declined from 629,507 students in 2011 to 542,458 in 2018. The decrease in this indicator is associated with a significant decrease in the contingent of the paid department (from 498 440 students in 2011 – to 379 581 in 2017, i.e. 70% of the total number of students). The proportion of students studying in the state language is 64.5%, in Russian – 31%, and in English – 4.5%⁶. The ratio of the number of students in public and private institutions is changing in favour of the latter. Therefore, availability problem includes financial issues, and the pool of potential students, including vulnerable groups, which should be in focus of social policy (students from low-income families, single parent and large families, orphans, the disabled) and the older people who wish to receive an additional or completely different education.

The mechanism of admission to universities affects the accessibility of education. According to the Kazakhstani legislation, applicants have the opportunity of entering the university at their own expense (charge), or by government grants. The right to receive a grant is also provided to persons of the Kazakh nationality who are not RK citizens (repatriates) and permanently residing stateless persons. The legislation provides benefits in the form of quotas for certain categories of citizens.

Every year, secondary school graduates pass the Unified National Test (UNT), which was introduced in 2004. Since 2017, some changes were introduced again into the system. Graduates will pass separately examinations in schools (for obtaining a certificate of secondary education) and UNT, which will now serve as the test for admission to HEIs and accounted for in the allocation of government grants. In case of unsuccessful delivery, it will be possible to re-take UNT on a fee basis.

In total, at the beginning of the 2018/2019 school year, there are 128 uni-

⁵ Chen Q. Globalization and Transnational Academic Mobility. Chapter 2. Higher Education Transition and Academic Mobility in China. Springer; 2017. Series: East-West Crosscurrents in Higher Education. p. 13-33. (In Eng.)

⁶ Karavan.kz [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://www.caravan.kz/news/bolshe-poloviny-studentov-v-kazakhstanskikh-vuzakh-devushki-516047> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Russ.)

versities in Kazakhstan. 45 universities are state-owned, 79 are private, and 4 are foreign-owned⁷. Financing higher education system is based on the diversification of funding sources. In the GDP structure, the costs for higher and postgraduate education are at the level of 0.3%. In financing higher and postgraduate education, the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) allocates funds in two ways: to improve their material and technical base (only for state universities) and through so-called public contracts (grants) for training specialists. MES sets the minimum grant size and their number. This type of funding is directed to higher education institutions and their purposeful use is strictly controlled. The volume of the state order for the training of personnel in the 2017–2018 academic year amounted to 38,983 grants, a master's program – 10,046, Ph.D. – 1,279. In 2018, the average cost of an educational grant established by the government at the bachelor's level is about EUR 1,644 in national universities and EUR 1,147 in other universities⁸. Private universities have more freedom in matters of financing, improving the material and technical base.

In Kazakhstan, a new model of university integration was developed. Higher education institution in Astana (Nur-Sultan from 20.03.2019), was opened on the initiative of the President of Kazakhstan. Nazarbayev University is a national brand of higher education in Kazakhstan, combining the advantages of the national education system and the world's best scientific and educational practice. This is the first university of Kazakhstan, which operates in accordance with international academic standards and the principles of autonomy and academic freedom. Academic and research programs of Nazarbayev University developed in collaboration with leading universities in the world ranking of 30 best universities of the world.

However, admission to Nazarbayev University is associated with certain dif-

ferences – Nazarbayev University accepts a small number of the best graduates of Kazakhstan schools to participate in the competition and conducts complex entrance exams. From 2015 to 2018 academic years, the total number of university graduates was about 2,600 people. Other private competitive but expensive universities in Kazakhstan are the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Forecasting, with a tuition fee of just over 2 million tenge (about € 4,700), as well as the Kazakhstan-British Technical University, in which one year of education costs from 1.45 million up to 2 million tenge per year, depending on the specialty, in order to receive a double-diploma education, you will have to pay additional international examinations. Three of the most expensive universities closes Almaty Management University, here annual training costs from 700 thousand tenge, training in English in various specialties will cost up to 1.5 million tenge per year.

The state universities – Al-Farabi Kazakh National University in Almaty and the Gumilev Eurasian National University in the capital, training varies from 619,5 thousand tenge to 1.07 million tenge per year [20]. However, none of the private universities of Kazakhstan were included in the ratings of international agencies. On September 26, 2018, the results of the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019 were published, and this year two universities from Kazakhstan entered the list for the first time – the Al-Farabi Kazakh National University (group 801-1000) and the Gumilev Eurasian National University (group 1001+). This achievement is quite significant, but it only marks the initial step in the long journey of Kazakhstani universities toward international recognition.

Kazakhstan and China formed a system of intergovernmental educational cooperation following the visit of Chinese President Hu Jintao to Kazakhstan in June 2003,

⁷ Kazinform [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://news.mail.ru/economics/36184617/?frommail=1> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Russ.)

⁸ NUR.KZ. [The Government has Determined the Cost of Studying in Universities of Kazakhstan for 3 Years in Advance] [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://www.nur.kz/1728632-pravitelstvo-opredelilo-stoimost-uceby-v-vuzah-kazahstana-na-3-goda-vpered.html> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Russ.)



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.

According to the National Statistics Committee, Kazakhstan annually amounting 100,000 high school graduates; 20% of them, go to study abroad. In 2016, 86% of 101,044 Kazakh students studying abroad

choose Russian and Chinese universities⁹. 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 2018¹⁰. This figure is less than a number of Kazakh students in Russia, estimated in 100 thousand. However, the comparatively much more than in South Korea, with 1600 Kazakh students. Students from Kazakhstan mainly study technical disciplines such as oil exploration and extraction, engineering, construction and transport, as well as social sciences (fig. 1).

Since 2008, Kazakhstan has already occupied the 9th place in the top 10 sending countries by the total number of foreign students in China, and in 2015 it has risen to 8th place. According to our survey, Chinese education has become attractive for Kazakhstani youth for several reasons:

- a significant number of scholarships, which either partially or fully cover study in China, which is very important for families with low or middle income levels;
- the possibility of admission without passing the UNT;
- Acquisition, along with a certain specialty, of knowledge of Chinese and, possibly, English, which is impossible in Kazakhstani universities;
- the attractiveness of the socio-economic, geographic, geopolitical, historical and cultural conditions of the great neighbour;
- the dynamic of Chinese economic development;

⁹ Why do Kazakhstani School Graduates Choose Russian and Chinese Universities? [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://m.sputniknews.kz/society/20180518/5674966.html> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Kazakh)

¹⁰ [The Ministry of Education announced 2017 study abroad data: in 2017 the number of international students was 60.84 million] [Electronic resource]. Available at: <https://www.mxbang.cn/archives/6072> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Chinese)

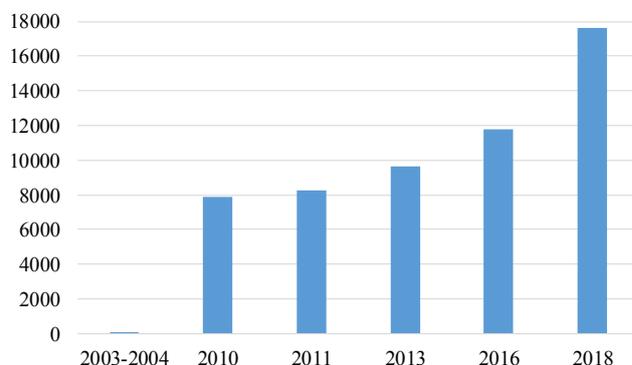


Fig. 1. Number of Kazakhstani students in China

Source: Ministry of Education of China.

– prospects for further employment due to the increasing penetration of Chinese business and investment in Kazakhstan.

According to the survey of Kazakhstani students studying in China, 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 favour of China for 23.8% of respondents (fig. 2). Regarding Chinese educational institutions preferred by Kazakhstani 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.

Currently, five Confucius institutes operate in Kazakhstan: two in Almaty and one in each of Astana, Karagandy and Aktobe. These institutes offer Chinese language courses, which allow students to pass China's Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) state exam for the certification of proficiency in the Chinese language, which is necessary to pursue higher education in China.

The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has boosted China's education internationalization efforts. In

What is attractive to you in education in China?

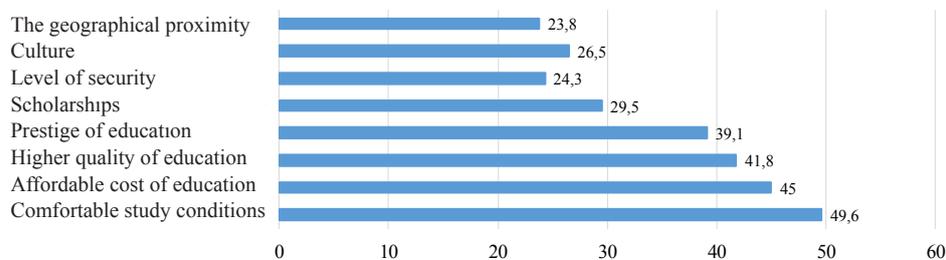


Fig. 2. The Reasons of Attractiveness of Chinese education for Kazakhstani Students

Source: Survey.



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. 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, 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-funded¹¹. 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 [21]. Therefore, the educational migration from Kazakhstan to China shows continuous growth dynamics. Along with the availability of scholarships and China's economic boom¹², Chinese education has become attractive for Kazakh youth for a number of other reasons.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through human communication, scientific cooperation, China will contribute to building an alternative to the Western system by the educational process. After gaining independence and expanding the educational borders of Kazakhstan, China occupied an important place as a partner in academic mobility and cooperation in education. First, this was due to dynamic development of China-Kazakhstan eco-

nomie cooperation and as a result growing people-to-people communication. As for Kazakhstani students seeking to get their education at universities in China, the main incentives for them are the pragmatism of choice under conditions of relatively high quality and affordable prices, and sometimes free access to programs, and more importantly, the possibility of post-graduate employment in framework of the spreading powerful economic system of a country that claims to be regional, and over time, possibly global leadership. At the same time, higher education institutions in China as a state-owned products remain embedded within national higher education systems as an essential factor in ensuring economic productivity and competitiveness within the BRI [22]. On the other hand, this intensive educational cooperation with China maintaining Kazakhstani labour market providing qualified specialists for various areas, especially those that are not widespread in our country. For Kazakhstan at the state level, international education serves a broader purpose. It actively contributes to the development of the national economy. In this sense, Kazakhstani graduates of Chinese universities, serving Chinese enterprises and companies in the country, will also objectively be involved in the economy of their country, especially at a raw materials appendage or production site for Chinese companies and investments. The analysis of the interview shows that the ability to economically raise the level of personal and family well-being, to ensure their social growth is very important when choosing education in China. Pragmatic factors can suppress sinophobia and wariness, which Sébastien Peyrouse discussing in his "Discussing China: Sino-philia and sinophobia in Central Asia" article [23]. Our conclusion regarding China's soft power, which is somewhat at variance with the above study, is that the attractiveness of the "Chinese model" of economic development is able to overcome suspicion and a certain negativity of the perception of that part of Kazakhstan's society that faces

¹¹ Kazinform [Electronic resource].

¹² Belt and Road Initiative offers more opportunities for students. Available at: <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/qwyw/rdxw/11797.htm> (accessed 11.05.2019). (In Eng.)

the choice of personal development and the prospects for successful self-realization. Even if not all Kazakhstanis perceive modern China as the focus of reformism, benevolent pacifism and harmonious inclusionism, nevertheless, pragmatism and sober calculation in this situation triumphs, and maybe even prompted by China's perceived regional and global leadership in the 21st century [24–30].

Therefore, answering the questions posed at the beginning of the article, we argue that China is interested in attracting students from Kazakhstan as followers of promoting its image and supporters of its influence in Central Asia, which has always been a strategically important part of China's neighbourhood, and where Kazakhstan is today one of the important players. All actions of Chinese foreign policy in bilateral relations and educational projects within BRI are aimed at this. As for the attractiveness of Chinese universities for Kazakhstani youth, they see in this education the most rational path to professional and social growth in the context of the growing influence of the "Chinese model" of development.

Here we would like to contribute to the discussion on the central role of education, formulated by Ewnetu H. Tamene and Lou Shizhou in the work we mentioned: will education remain a public good and social responsibility in the sense of promoting the development of society or will be perceived as a private good for consumption and benefit individuals. We believe that education can ultimately be both. It would seem that the personal decision of school graduates and their families to choose the Chinese education system in the future would benefit Kazakhstan society. The need for such personnel is

already recognized at the level of the political elite, in whose speeches the advice to learn Chinese sounds with enviable constancy. Kazakhstan, as a neighbour of China, dependent on Chinese trade and economy, will be forced to adjust its policy in accordance with the interests and preferences of China. Under these conditions, students trained in the Chinese education system can play a key role in developing a state strategy and its implementation.

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 expand academic mobility and research collaboration opportunities, as well as to supply the country's labour market with qualified specialists in various fields. 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 its own secondary school graduates.

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