



LESSONS FROM THE WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS: THE CHINESE EXPERIENCE

Autumn is the time for summing up the results in many areas of activity and drawing up annual international rankings as the most important tool for assessment and orientation. The World University Rankings 2022, which has already become traditional, gives an idea of the status of the best educational institutions in the world according to the Times Higher Education (THE) journal. This year, it includes 1,662 universities from 99 countries. Another 452 universities have "reporter" status, which means they provided data but did not meet the selection criteria for the ranking. The composition of the top 10 remained almost unchanged, these are the expected two British pillars of higher education - Oxford (1st position) and Cambridge (6th position) and eight American universities - California Institute of Technology, Harvard University, Stanford University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Princeton University, University of California at Berkeley, Yale University, and University of Chicago.

While there were no surprises in the top 10, there were noticeable changes in the top 20 due to the breakthrough into this group of two Chinese universities at once - Peking University and Tsinghua University, which shared 16th place. Moreover, China is also among the five most represented countries in the top 200 with its 10 universities, above it only the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia. Many experts wonder if China will enter the top ten universities in the world with such a pace of development next year. This success is not least due to research conducted by Chinese universities on the virus, universities that have published medical research studies related to COVID-19 have significantly increased their citations this year. David Watkins, head of data science at THE, said some articles attracted over 20,000 links within a year of publication.

Apart from this, other factors also contribute to the rise of Chinese universities. The government spends more than \$650 billion a year on education. It should be recalled that the education system, which suffered greatly during the so-called Chinese Cultural Revolution, has undergone major changes due to the free-market reforms under Deng Xiaoping. Education was seen as a way to further spread the party's ideology and values, as well as to achieve the country's progress.

China is currently taking a dual approach: focusing on increasing the number of institutions and regulating and improving their quality. As a result, Chinese universities regularly rank in the top echelons of world rankings. Unlike other countries, for example, India, where global rankings are not given any importance, China perceived them as the most important benchmark for the development of the education system and began to work diligently to eliminate its fundamental shortcomings and

managed to effectively penetrate the global rankings.

At the same time, the state has chosen a certain hierarchical financing scheme. To create several first-class universities of the international level, most of the resources are poured into large multidisciplinary research universities at the expense of all other educational institutions in the country, the total number of which is close to three thousand. Project 211, which supported 99 universities valued at the US \$2.2 billion between 1996 and 2000, Project 985, which created the Chinese equivalent of the Ivy League from 9 universities, and President Xi Jinping's recent World Class 2.0 initiative - an attempt to bring 42 universities to world-class level - led to preferential funding for a group of about 10% of the country's elite universities, which are at the top of the pyramid. About 40% of local public higher education institutions and four-year private independent education institutions are at the middle level of the system. Below are the remaining higher vocational colleges and private universities. Universities of the middle and lower level are not focused on scientific research Education in China.

From the standpoint of the student body, the financial strengthening of domestic universities has led to the partial abandonment of the extremely expensive international education, which is still considered prestigious. Currently, China's higher education institutions graduate 8 million students annually. This is more than the number of graduates from India and the United States combined. This number is expected to triple in the coming years.

Significant investment in higher education and research and development capabilities has to some extent stimulated the return of those people who left the country as a result of the brain drain to continue their academic research and its applications in China. On the other hand, leading universities spend significant funds on recruiting foreign scientists, often ignoring Chinese researchers and academics. This policy, aimed at increasing the recognition and ranking of these universities, is often criticized by the academic community.

To increase research outcomes, Chinese scientists are encouraged with monetary rewards for publications in scientific journals - a system that is not unique to China but has been taken to the extreme by Chinese universities. The average monetary remuneration for natural science articles published in Western journals in 2016 was \$43,783, but in some cases, the remuneration reaches \$165,000 for publications in prestigious journals such as Nature or Science. In addition, publications in academic journals are often required for hiring, promotion, research grants, and doctoral degrees. More than 900,000 research papers were published in China between 2016 and 2018. This figure puts it at the top of the list for natural

science publications, surpassing the United States, which managed to produce about 600,000 articles in the same period. Institutions with the largest growth in citation rates from 2016 to 2021 are the Metropolitan Medical University, Wenzhou Medical University, and Wuhan University, which are located in mainland China. Thus, China has become a world leader in scientific publishing.

The final effect of the COVID-19 pandemic goes far beyond the medical field alone, it has become a dominant social problem on a global scale, including for education and science. While the whole world is confronting the virus, we are simultaneously seeing a sharp decline in social interaction and cooperation in many areas and, as a result, a decrease in the productivity and efficiency of these areas. Nevertheless, experts are confident that the demand for higher education will undoubtedly continue and even grow since the general development trend has become a gradual advance towards the global knowledge economy.

In particular, in response to the crisis, the Chinese Ministry of Education adopted new rules on government scholarships for foreign students to study in China and published Opinions on Accelerating and Expanding Education Opportunities in a New Era. The ministry declares China's firm commitment to further open education to the outside world, including the mobility of knowledge and people across national borders at various levels in all directions. China was one of the first to make such an official statement of its attitude towards global participation in higher education in the post-COVID-19 era. In terms of future developments that have a lot to do with higher education in China, it is clear that blended learning models will become more prevalent, and online education in China will gain momentum.

Returning to the results of the World University Rankings 2022, it should be mentioned that Kazakhstan entered it with its three universities, although they are all located in the 1201+ group, these are al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Eurasian National University named after A. L.N. Gumilyov, and Satbayev University. As for other Central Asian states, the ranking includes the Institute of Telecommunications and Informatics of Turkmenistan and ten universities of Uzbekistan, but all of them are reporters. If we take the rapid advancement of Chinese universities as an example, then for significant growth in the criteria of domestic universities, the key condition is funding, which is equally necessary for teaching, research, knowledge transfer, and internationalization, those key areas that are considered by the world academic community as the most important areas of activity and the demand for universities.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- According to the press service of the Kazakh Foreign Ministry, recently Kazakhstan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council for the term of 2022–2024. Within the Council, the country will work on a number of priority areas, including the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women, the universal abolition of the death penalty, the fight against all forms of intolerance, and promoting freedom of religion and belief. It will also work towards upholding and assuring inclusive and universal education (Kazinform, 15.10.2021).
- Secretary of the Security Council of Kyrgyzstan Marat Imankulov had an online meeting with the External Security Commissioner of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China Cheng Guoping. The parties discussed the situation in Afghanistan and issues of bilateral cooperation in countering terrorism, separatism and extremism in all their manifestations and threats in the field of cybersecurity. Cheng Guoping noted the importance of developing cooperation in ensuring regional security and deepening good-neighborly relations between China and Kyrgyzstan (Fmprc.gov.cn, 15.10.2021).
- Within the 6th ministerial meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia held in Nur-Sultan, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan Ruslan Kazakbaev met with Special Representative of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan for International Cooperation Yerzhan Kazykhanov. The parties discussed current issues of Kyrgyz-Kazakh interaction and exchanged views on international and regional agendas in the framework of multilateral platforms. The sides expressed readiness for further cooperation to expand and deepen bilateral relations (Kabar, 13.10.2021).
- The President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon visited France, where he had a meeting with Gerard Larcher, Speaker of the Senate. The parties discussed a broad range of issues of bilateral cooperation, including inter-parliamentary collaboration between the two countries. The parties expressed satisfaction with the current level of cooperation. President Rahmon emphasized Tajikistan's interest in learning from the experience of France's parliament. During the meeting, special attention was paid to the current situation in Afghanistan (Asia-Plus, 14.10.2021).
- The Delegation of the European Union to Kyrgyzstan developed and adopted a new Roadmap for engagement with civil society for 2021-2027, which guides how the EU would interact with civil society organizations in the country. According to the document, the priorities of the EU engagement with the civil society in Kyrgyzstan for the next years would be governance and digital transformation, human development, inclusive quality education and skills development (Kabar, 13.10.2021).
- Minsk hosted a regular meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the CIS. The meeting was attended by representatives of the Foreign Ministries of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The participants signed various documents regulating the cooperation within the CIS. One of the important decisions was the approval of a convention on the prohibition of biological and toxic weapons (Iacis.ru, 14.10.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The agricultural sector of Kazakhstan experienced significant growth in investments in fixed assets. Since the beginning of 2021, investments in agriculture, forestry and fisheries have grown by more than 40% exceeding \$1 billion. The main sources of these investments are enterprises' funds and non-bank loans. During the same period of 2020, the volume of investments exceeded \$685.2 million. The largest amount of capital was accounted for the North Kazakhstan region. Akmola and Pavlodar regions also enter the top three (Qazaq TV, 13.10.2021).
- Russia's Gazprombank will issue a \$300 million loan to modernize Uzbekistan's gas transportation system. Within the project, Uzbekistan will build, overhaul and reconstruct 545 km of gas pipelines, as well as repair installations at compressor stations. In 2019, Gazprombank allocated \$300 million to expand the capacity of the Shurtan Gas Processing Plant. In summer 2021, it signed a \$750 million agreement with Ferkenesco Management, the manager of the Samarkand Chemical Plant (UzReport, 12.10.2021).
- Higher prices of oil and natural gas will strengthen the national economies of traditional energy-exporting countries such as Turkmenistan. Crude oil prices have risen by 64% this year while natural gas prices have almost doubled in the last six months. According to the results of the three quarters of this year, the export of Turkmen blue fuel increased by 37.5% compared to the same period last year, and the production of natural gas increased by 23.3% (Orient, 15.10.2021).
- The Prime Minister of Kazakhstan Askar Mamin paid a visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and held talks with Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Presidential Affairs of the UAE Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Following bilateral negotiations, the countries agreed to implement joint projects worth \$6 billion. They signed an intergovernmental agreement on the establishment of a long-term partnership in the sectors of energy, agriculture, transport logistics, pharmaceuticals and finance. Currently, the UAE companies are participating in the implementation of 11 large investment projects in Kazakhstan with a total value of over \$3.5 billion (Qazaq TV, 11.10.2021).
- Minister of Industry and Technology of Turkey Mustafa Varank participated at the Industrial Forum of Tajik and Turkish Entrepreneurs, which was held within the meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic Cooperation. Minister Varank noted that Tajikistan and Turkey were intended to increase bilateral trade turnover to \$1 billion by 2022. Turkey remains one of the important economic and trade partners of Tajikistan and in the first six months of this year, trade between the two countries has reached \$177 million (Khovar, 14.10.2021).
- According to the Head of the Russian Export Center Veronika Nikishina, the country's non-resource non-energy exports may set a new historical record of \$180 billion by the end of 2021. Nikishina explained that in January-September 2021 non-resource exports increased by almost 40% year-on-year to \$135 billion. It should be noted that the volume of non-resource non-energy exports from Russia at the end of 2020 amounted to \$161.3 billion, which was almost 4% more than in 2019 (TASS, 15.10.2021).

Society and Culture

- The Minister of Emergency Situations of Kyrgyzstan Boobek Azhikeev visited the Office of Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Turkey. The purpose of the visit is to familiarize with the emergency management system in Turkey, visit organizations and structures dealing with the prevention and elimination of emergencies. During the meeting, the sides exchanged views on the need to establish bilateral contacts and to deepen cooperation (Kabar, 14.10.2021).
- Teatralnaya Gazeta organized the 7th International Anatolian Theater Prize ceremony in Istanbul on the stage of Istanbul Water Performing Arts. During the event, the TURKSOY International Theater Prize was presented to artists from Turkic-speaking countries for the first time. The special jury selected the laureates from among the artists who contributed to the development of theatrical art in 2019-2020. At the ceremony, this prize was also awarded to five theatrical figures of the Turkic world (TURKSOY, 12.10.2021).
- On the sidelines of the third Eurasian Women's Forum, the Kazakh delegation proposed an initiative to open the Eurasian Center for Research on Gender Equality in Almaty. The event with about 1500 representatives from almost a hundred countries, took place in Saint Petersburg. The participants also paid special attention to the case of Afghan women and called for organizing the delivery of humanitarian supplies to Afghanistan (Qazaq TV, 15.10.2021).
- Minister of Culture of Azerbaijan Anar Karimov hosted a series of meetings aimed at the expansion of Azerbaijan's international cultural cooperation. At the meeting with the Czech ambassador to Azerbaijan Milan Ekert, Minister Karimov stressed the high level of bilateral ties between the two countries and emphasized the need for the protection of cultural heritage, the development of film and music industries. Minister Karimov also met with the Secretary-General of the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development Altai Efendiyev and discussed the prospects of cooperation within the organization (AzerNews, 15.10.2021).
- The Russian authorities have lifted the travel ban for 150 thousand Uzbek migrants. Moreover, this decision was also applied to 150 thousand citizens of Tajikistan. However, Russia will not give amnesty to foreign citizens expelled by court decisions. Prior to this the Russian Cabinet of Ministers had approved a pilot project to attract 10 thousand labor migrants to Russia from Uzbekistan (Kun.uz, 12.10.2021).
- Uzbekistan improved its ranking in the Rule of Law index. In particular, the country ranked 85th out of 139 countries, rising fourteen positions. Uzbekistan's overall rule of law score increased by 4.1%, placing it at the 10th place out of 14 countries in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region and 11th out of 35 among lower-middle-income countries. Constraints on Government Powers, Reduction of Corruption, and Open Government factors substantially contributed to the country's new position (UzReport, 16.10.2021).