

Analysis of the Educational Cooperation Between China and Central Asian Countries Under "the Belt and Road Initiative"

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ABSTRACT

Central Asia is one of the core regions in the construction of "the Belt and Road". At present, cooperation in various fields is deepening, and cooperation in the field of education is also showing an upward trend. China and Central Asian countries have signed educational cooperation agreements and declarations to promote exchanges. Since the construction of "the Belt and Road", the number of students from Central Asian countries studying in China has been increasing; The cooperation in education between the two sides has facilitated cooperation among multiple colleges and universities with the support of China and Central Asian countries; The Chinese government's scholarship incentives for international students have also promoted learning and exchange. The valuable experience and achievements of the past have laid the foundation for China and Central Asian countries to continue promoting education cooperation in the future. Therefore, the author of this article believes that it is necessary to promote high-quality development of education cooperation, increase education cooperation in the fields of public health and safety, and contribute to the construction of a community with a shared future.

Keywords: *China, Central Asia, Education cooperation, Thoughts.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that it is a must to adhere to the theme of promoting high-quality development. To this end, under the impetus of the global economy, improving the quality and level of the international economic cycle is one of the key links. In recent years, with the promotion of "the Belt and Road" initiative, the education cooperation between China and Central Asian countries¹ has become closer, and the "Chinese study abroad craze" in Central Asian countries has continued to rise. This has laid a solid foundation for the common development and deepening exchanges between China and Central Asian countries in the future.

2. A REVIEW OF EDUCATION COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES

Throughout history, China and Central Asia have maintained close connections in various aspects such as commerce and culture. In the new era, China and Central Asian countries have cooperated in various aspects, with deepening cultural exchanges and closer cooperation in the field of education. After 1999, China signed education cooperation agreements with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan, proposing the overall principles of cooperation in the field of education and supporting and encouraging cooperation among colleges and universities, laying the foundation for mutual education cooperation. By 2002 and 2006, agreements on mutual recognition of academic qualifications and degree certificates were signed with Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Since 2004, China has successively opened 13 Confucius

1. The research object of this article is mainly Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Central Asian countries.

Institutes in Central Asia, including 5 in Kazakhstan, 4 in Kyrgyzstan, 2 in Tajikistan, and 2 in Uzbekistan. [1] From 2008 to 2009, China established the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Scholarship", providing government scholarships for international students from Central Asian countries, further promoting educational cooperation between the two sides.

With the proposal and construction of "the Belt and Road" initiative, the exchanges and cooperation between China and Central Asian countries have increased day by day, especially in the fields of education, health, sports, tourism and youth. The cooperation declarations² signed between China and the five Central Asian countries from 2014 to 2019 all pointed out the principles and directions of cooperation between the two sides in the field of education. China has always been committed to promoting educational cooperation and exchanges with Central Asian countries. In 2016, China released the "Promoting the Joint Construction of 'the Belt and Road' Education Action", which pointed out that "China will carry out three key cooperation areas based on basic, supportive and leading initiatives, align the will of countries along the line, learn from each other's advanced education experience, share high-quality education resources, and comprehensively promote the accelerated development of education in all countries".[2] As an important participant and promoter of global education governance, China has worked hard to achieve the educational goals of the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development". In 2020, it released the "Opinions on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening up of Education in the New Era", which proposed "building an upgraded version of 'the Belt and Road' education action under the new situation". [3] In the context of globalization, cooperation between China and the five Central Asian countries actively promotes higher education cooperation in promoting sustained economic development and transformation and upgrading of Central Asian

countries. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Education, and Development Planning departments of various countries form coordination departments to formulate medium - and long-term plans for educational exchange and cooperation between countries, providing policy guarantees for sustained cooperation.[4]

The cooperation between China and Central Asian countries in the field of education has achieved good results through the promotion and efforts of various parties. As stated in the 2022 "Joint Statement of the Leaders of China and the Five Central Asian Countries on the 30th Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations", "Over the past 30 years, China Central Asian relations have achieved leapfrog development, and all parties have fully utilized the advantages of geographical proximity, cultural exchange, and cultural cooperation." [5] By May 2023, at the China Asia Summit, countries expressed support for promoting student exchanges in colleges and universities and organizing youth forums; China provides government scholarships and organizes professional talents to study in China. The cooperation between China and Central Asian countries in the field of education is a practical implementation of the 1998 UNESCO "World Declaration on Higher Education in the 21st Century: Outlook and Action": "The principle of unity and true partnership among global higher education institutions is the key to education and training. Because education and training encourage understanding of global issues and the necessity of coexisting with different cultures and values. The partnership based on mutual respect and trust will be the fundamental model for the continuous development of higher education." [6] Cooperation in the field of education is not only beneficial for cultural exchanges, but also for promoting economic and technological cooperation among all parties. In the context of globalization, the improvement of education level, sharing of educational resources, and innovation of educational concepts have a direct impact on sustainable and high-quality development of society. As an advocate of "the Belt and Road" and "a community with a shared future for mankind", China actively promotes high-quality cooperation in science and education to further enhance exchanges and interactions among multicultural systems. This is not only to inherit the spirit of cooperative development in history, but also to practice the concept of win-win cooperation and

2. In May 2014, "The Joint Declaration Between the People's Republic of China and Turkmenistan on the Development and Deepening of Strategic Partnership" was signed; On May 12, 2017, "The Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Uzbekistan on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" was signed; On June 13, 2019, "The Joint Declaration Between the People's Republic of China and the Kyrgyz Republic on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" was signed; On June 16, 2019, "The Joint Declaration Between the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Tajikistan on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" was signed; On September 12, 2019, "The Joint Declaration of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Kazakhstan" was signed.

building a community with a shared future for mankind.

3. ANALYSIS OF EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION ACHIEVEMENTS BETWEEN CHINA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES UNDER "THE BELT AND ROAD" INITIATIVE

"The Belt and Road" initiative has greatly promoted regional exchanges and cooperation, which provides a platform for China and Central Asian countries to carry out educational cooperation. Countries have strengthened education for overseas students, and exchanged teachers, summer camps, art troupes and academic exchanges. This provides impetus for international exchange and cooperation in education, as well as for improving the quality of education development in various countries. In recent years, with the expansion of economic exchanges and mutual aid cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, certain achievements have been made in the scale of international students and higher education cooperation.

3.1 Expanding Scale of International Students from Central Asian Countries

Under "the Belt and Road" initiative, China's support for Central Asian countries in the field of education has increased. At the same time, the 2020 Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Other Eight Departments on Accelerating and Expanding the Opening up of Education in the New Era pointed out that it is necessary to "promote the opening up of education and strengthen the brand of 'studying in China'". [7] The craze for Central Asian countries to study in China is growing. China and Central Asian countries share the same people's hearts and reach a consensus through education. In recent years, the overall scale of international students studying in China has shown an upward trend, as shown in "Figure 1".³

The overall trend analysis shows the following characteristics: First, the number of Central Asian students studying in China has continued to rise

since 2010 to an average annual growth rate of 12.33% in 2018, higher than other countries along "the Belt and Road" in the same period. Secondly, self-funded students studying in China have become the main body of students from Central Asian countries. The proportion of students studying in China to the total number of students studying abroad in the five countries is constantly increasing, and China has become one of the main destinations and preferred countries for students studying in Central Asian countries. [8] Thirdly, the proportion of graduate students from Central Asian countries coming to China is increasing year by year, and the number of self-funded international students has always been higher than that of scholarship students. Fourthly, the growth rate of scholarship international students is faster than that of self-funded international students; The proportion of international students with academic qualifications has been increasing year by year. [9] From the trend in recent years, the number of Central Asian students studying in China has been on the rise. Although the number of students studying in China from the five Central Asian countries has slightly decreased since 2020 due to the impact of the epidemic, it is expected to change soon. This fully shows that under "the Belt and Road" initiative, China and Central Asian countries are constantly promoting exchanges, striving to realize the exchange of resources and cultures, and committed to establishing a sound international education cooperation system. During this process, China continuously innovates its concepts, expands its fields, actively promotes educational cooperation with Central Asian countries, and strives to build a community with a shared future for mankind and achieve win-win cooperation.

3. The reference data for this table comes from the "Brief Statistics of International Students Studying in China" compiled by the Department of International Cooperation and Exchange of the Ministry of Education from 2012 to 2017, as well as the continuous trend of Central Asian youth studying in China by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. 2023.05. <https://www.mfa.gov.cn>

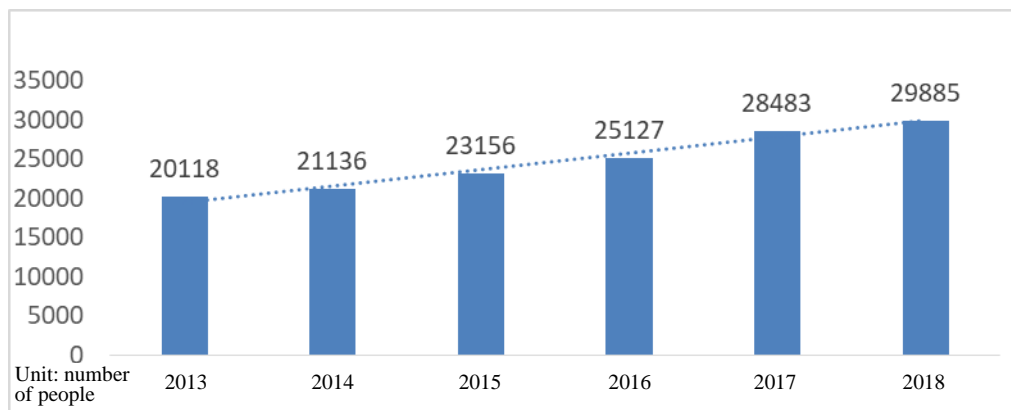


Figure 1 Statistics on the number of Central Asian international students from 2013 to 2018.

3.2 Increasing Incentives

The establishment of scholarships is a direct way and incentive measure to attract international students to come to China. Central Asian students studying abroad in China enjoy various scholarships provided by the government. Since 2012, the number of Chinese government scholarships awarded to international students from Central Asian countries has been increasing year by year. The recipients of Chinese government scholarships are mainly academic students, with graduate level international students accounting for the majority. In addition to providing national scholarships to Central Asian international students, various regions in China have also formulated some incentive measures. For example, some colleges and universities in Gansu Province, located in western China, have set up president scholarships and personal scholarships to attract Central Asian international students; Shaanxi Province has established a special scholarship for international students. At the same time, Central Asian countries have also established scholarship programs such as Kazakhstan's Borashak International Scholarship to provide financial support for international students.

This measure promoted by China and Central Asian countries over the years has promoted the gradual formation of a new situation of "the Belt and Road" education initiative, strengthened the education cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, and provided a favorable guarantee for both sides to cultivate outstanding talents and enhance academic exchanges.

3.3 Intensifying Cooperation in Running Schools

Based on the strengthening of education cooperation between China and Central Asian countries through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Shanghai Cooperation Organization universities have been established in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. In 2015, the "New Silk Road University Alliance" (later renamed the "Silk Road University Alliance") was established, with seven Central Asian universities including Kazakhstan National University and Kyrgyzstan International Innovation University joining. In 2016, the "China Central Asia University Alliance" was established. In 2017, China, together with countries and regions along "the Belt and Road", established the "Teacher Education Alliance", the "Humanities and Social Sciences Alliance", and the "Books and Archives Publishing Alliance", which were awarded by the National Normal University of Tajikistan, the Tashkent National Normal University, the National University of Uzbekistan, the Samarkand National University of Uzbekistan, the Bishkek Humanities University. The joining of universities such as Turan University in Kazakhstan has jointly facilitated the construction of educational practice bases, co-built research and information resource sharing platforms, and provided convenience for deepening cooperation among colleges and universities in various countries.

Through efforts, the education cooperation between China, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan is relatively mature. China has become the second largest destination country for Kazakhstani students studying abroad, with approximately 14,000 students studying in China as of the end of 2019 [10]. Chinese and Uzbekistan universities offer

academic education through a "2+2" model. The Chinese Language and Culture Center at the Navoi State Language University in Uzbekistan was established in September 2021 [11]. The establishment of institutions such as the HI China International Youth Development Alliance and the All China Youth Federation has also provided a platform for education cooperation between China and Ukraine. The construction of these platforms provides convenience for students to exchange and learn in China.

The cooperation between China and Central Asian countries in the field of education, especially the exchange between colleges and universities, not only deepens cooperation in economy, trade, and technology, but also lays a solid foundation for mutual civil communication, cultural exchange, and friendship.

3.4 Increasing Scale of Confucius Institutes

Since 2005, Confucius Institutes have been established in various Central Asian countries, providing a platform for attracting international students to study in China and laying a foundation for strengthening scientific research and teaching exchanges in higher education in various countries. Up to now, there are 13 Confucius Institutes and 22 Confucius Classrooms in Central Asian countries. By 2022, the registered number of Confucius Classrooms in Kyrgyzstan has exceeded 25,000 [12]. Uzbekistan has over 10,000 students, and the Confucius Institute of Samarkand State Foreign Language Institute has trained over 3,000 students since its establishment in 2013. [13] In November 2021, the number of students at the Confucius Institute of Tajikistan National University increased from 200 at its inception to over 4,000. [14] The exchange platform using Confucius Institutes as a bridge has enabled more Central Asian students to understand China, igniting a wave of studying abroad in China and providing broader space for educational cooperation.

In summary, under "the Belt and Road" Initiative, many Chinese universities have cooperated with Central Asian countries to promote joint education and strengthen educational cooperation. Many colleges and universities in Central Asia have also established Chinese language majors, and several Chinese colleges and universities have established Central Asian country research centers, promoting academic exchanges and educational cooperation between the two sides.

4. NEW THOUGHTS ON EDUCATION COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA AND CENTRAL ASIAN COUNTRIES UNDER "THE BELT AND ROAD" INITIATIVE

The experience since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Central Asia has proven that both sides should actively implement the declaration of the "China - Central Asia Xi'an Summit" and establish a broader space for cultural exchanges in the future. It is necessary to seize opportunities together, through government cooperation, policy guidance, mobilize learning activities at the basic level of education and the public, and enhance emotions among the people. The friendship between countries lies in mutual affinity between the people, and mutual affinity between the people lies in mutual understanding." [15] "Mutual understanding between the people" will reach consensus, and cooperation and exchanges in the field of education will undoubtedly be one of the ways to achieve this goal. Nowadays, the world situation is constantly changing and new challenges are emerging. China and Central Asian countries should continuously innovate their educational cooperation ideas and provide impetus for each other's talent cultivation.

4.1 Promoting High-quality Development of Educational Cooperation

Firstly, the high-quality development of education is the artery of the country and the foundation for China and Central Asia to continue promoting cooperation in other fields. China and the Central Asian countries should promote the efficient implementation of educational cooperation initiatives as a whole, and the joint construction of "the Belt and Road" is a huge and complex systematic project. Since 2013, China has first attached importance to economic and trade cooperation. The economic relations between China and the Central Asian countries have become increasingly close, and the two sides have achieved fruitful results in commercial and trade cooperation. This good economic achievement should be the basis for promoting the high-quality development of education cooperation. In fact, the achievements of education cooperation since "the Belt and Road" construction have proved the driving force of economic interaction. Emphasizing the high-quality development of education cooperation between China and Central Asian countries, gradually

optimizing the proportion of science and technology majors in expanding the scale of international students, and cultivating more scientific and technological personnel will be more conducive to economic cooperation between each other. The construction of economy, people's livelihood, science and technology, ecology, culture and other contents and objectives in "the Belt and Road" construction needs to be coordinated and comprehensively promoted, and education cooperation is indispensable. President Xi Jinping emphasizes to promote "the Belt and Road" from the stage of overall layout to the stage of high-quality development. Therefore, the education cooperation between China and Central Asian countries should continue to innovate and promote high-quality development.

For China, it is necessary to leverage the geographical advantages of the western region, with Xi'an, Shaanxi as the core, strengthen regional and national research, and strengthen cooperation and exchange in multiple fields such as history, archaeology, cross-border interpersonal flow, language and literature. Secondly, it is crucial to leverage the advantages of higher education, and further strengthen educational cooperation with Central Asian countries, such as utilizing networks and project cooperation to enhance international teaching capabilities. Furthermore, there is a need to improve the high-quality development of international student education. The exchange of international students between China and Central Asia has promoted cultural co construction between each other. In the new era, while improving the high-quality development of higher education, it is also necessary to give full play to the role of universities such as Shaanxi, Xinjiang, and Gansu. For example, with Xi'an International Studies University as the core, there is a necessity to build a multidisciplinary talent training and co - construction base between China and Central Asian countries to enhance the high-quality development of science, education, and culture on both sides.

Looking back at the history, China has a profound cultural origin with Central Asian countries. Now, looking forward to the future, with "the Belt and Road" as the link, under the environment of digital informatization and technological modernization, the science, education and cultural exchanges between China and Central Asian countries will enter a broader field.

4.2 Increasing Cooperation in the Field of Public Health Education

The prevalence of COVID-19 in recent years clearly reflects the importance of strengthening public health cooperation, promoting high-quality development of medical technology, and building a community with a shared future for mankind. The China - Central Asia Summit held in Xi'an, Shaanxi, China in 2023 also emphasized this issue. Central Asian countries have also expressed their intention to strengthen cooperation in the field of public health, and strive to build a healthy Silk Road and maintain global public health security.

To this end, it is a must to give full play to the leading role of public health cooperation in "the Belt and Road" and build a China Central Asia "health community", which not only promotes the high-quality development of "the Belt and Road", but also promotes the high-quality development of China's medical field. China should adhere to the concept of a community with a shared future for mankind while promoting high-quality development in the field of healthcare. The first is to actively promote educational exchanges and visits in the field of healthcare; Build a platform for mutual visits and cooperation. The second is to jointly establish a high-level medical and health talent training system. The third is to actively carry out project cooperation in the medical field, and build an internationalized medical service core area with central cities such as Xi'an in Shaanxi, Lanzhou in Gansu, and Urumqi in Xinjiang as clusters. The fourth is to promote the health and rehabilitation effects of traditional Chinese medicine and ethnic medicine. The fifth is to jointly establish mechanisms for the prevention and control of infectious diseases in the field of public health.

The modernization level of the medical field and cooperation with surrounding regions will be conducive to promoting regional interaction, achieving mutual understanding among the people, and thus consolidating political relations with neighboring countries. Looking ahead to the future, China's modernization capabilities in the medical field will continue to strengthen, and the joint construction and cooperation between China and Central Asian countries in the medical field will further deepen cultural and economic ties. This is a need to build a shared future for mankind, as well as to promote high-quality cooperation in areas such as economy, technology, culture, and ecology.

4.3 Education Cooperation Projects to Promote Modernization of Security Capabilities

At present, China and Central Asian countries have reached a vision of comprehensively deepening cooperation to ensure regional peace, stability, and security. In the digital age, information security issues have become new threats and challenges to national security. China and Central Asian countries have completed a number of security cooperation under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Looking forward to the future, security and stability issues are the basis for the construction of "the Belt and Road". Therefore, in the process of promoting the modernization of China's national security system and capabilities, China should actively promote cooperation with Central Asian countries in enhancing the modernization of security capabilities.

The first is to promote education cooperation led by network security. China supports Central Asian countries in enhancing their network capacity, and countries have also expressed support for combating various forms of cybercrime within frameworks such as the "Global Data Security Initiative". For China, the security and stability of the Northwest region are closely related to Central Asian countries. Therefore, by leveraging the advantages of digital technology and focusing on regional security, there is a must to continuously promote cooperation and technological exchanges in the field of security. The second is to promote cooperation in policing with the goal of modernizing security capabilities, strengthen communication and cooperation in enhancing the modernization capacity of public security education with Northwest Xinjiang as the core, and increase the exchange and cooperation of modern investigative techniques. The third is to build a modern security system for preventing and resolving major risks. Both Central Asian countries and China are facing risks of infiltration, destruction, subversion, and division by foreign forces. The significant significance of national security and constitutional system is consistent for all parties. To this end, open dialogue, strengthening technological mutual assistance and cooperation, jointly building a modern security capability system, and promoting education cooperation at the relevant technical level will be a beautiful vision of mutual benefit and shared destiny for people of all countries.

The first China Central Asia Summit successfully held in 2023 has given people a new vision for future China - Central Asia relations as looking back on the achievements. "All things grow together without harming each other, and the paths run parallel without contradicting each other." China and Central Asian countries are closely linked in the development of each other at geographical, historical, cultural and other levels. Under "the Belt and Road" initiative, China and Central Asian countries have deepened practical cooperation in various fields, further enhancing mutual friendship and understanding. In the future, educational cooperation will enrich the connotation of the strategic partnership between China and the five Central Asian countries, enrich the achievements of the joint construction of "the Belt and Road", and bring tangible benefits to the people of all countries. [16]

5. CONCLUSION

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Central Asian countries for more than 30 years, China has always adhered to historical friendship and committed to win-win cooperation in the construction model. In the construction of "the Belt and Road", the relationship between China and Central Asian countries has become increasingly prominent. Looking back at the cooperation in the field of education today, it clearly demonstrates that China and Central Asian countries have opened the door to communication from the government to the people, and have achieved fruitful results in academic education, academic exchanges, language learning, and other aspects. Practice has proved that the joint construction of "the Belt and Road" between China and Central Asia has injected strength into regional stability and economic development. Central Asian countries have continuously improved their position in China's peripheral diplomacy, and gradually become the main region for China to open to the west and develop land cooperation, creating a force of common destiny. [17] At present, valuable experience has been gained in educational exchanges. In the future, with the promotion of "the Belt and Road" initiative, China and Central Asian countries should continue to broaden their thinking, comply with the trend of globalization of higher education, actively promote educational cooperation that meets the needs of economic development of both sides, and provide talent and knowledge guarantee for the joint construction of

"the Belt and Road" and the construction of a community of shared future between China and Central Asia.

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