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Russian–Chinese Academic Mobility As Competitive Partnership

S. V. Ryazantsev^{a, c, *}, S. M. Shakhray^{b, c, **}, A. A. Yanik^{c, ***}, and S. M. Popova^{c, ****, #}

^aMoscow State Institute of International Relations (University), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Moscow, Russia

^bMoscow State University, Moscow, Russia

^cInstitute of Socio-Political Research, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow, Russia

*e-mail: riazan@mail.ru

**e-mail: s9895929@yandex.ru

***e-mail: aa.yanick@yandex.ru

****e-mail: sv-2002-1@yandex.ru

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Abstract—Trends and characteristics of Russian–Chinese academic mobility are considered as a complex phenomenon, the impact of which goes far beyond the framework of bilateral relations in higher education. The prevailing target model of development of Russian–Chinese academic mobility, based on quantitative indicators, is shown as not accounting for the process specifics and not enough harmonized with solutions to other no less important tasks associated with pursuing the interests of the Russian Federation in the international arena and achieving the goals of Russia’s national development. Particular attention is paid to complex causal relationships and multilevel effects that accompany functioning processes in Russian–Chinese relations in the subject area under study. The competitive partnership model, proposed by the authors to describe interaction between the two countries, appears promising both for conceptualizing the diversity of processes and opposite effects of Russian–Chinese cooperation in higher education and as a theoretical basis for creating an effective target model and improving the humanitarian dimension of cooperation between Russia and the PRC.

Keywords: academic mobility, education export, global market of educational services, Russian–Chinese cooperation, international relations, target model, competitive partnership.

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The development of cooperation between Russia and China in higher education in general and in academic mobility in particular is a complex multidimensional process, effective control of which requires clear goals, systematic monitoring, and reliable indicators, ensuring that tactical successes will not turn into strategic failures. In this context, an important theoretical and practical task is to conceptualize a vast interdisci-

plinary data array on Russian–Chinese academic mobility and various interactive effects between the two countries in the highly competitive global market of educational services in a fast-changing world. The topicality of this task is associated with the presence of various objective factors, from the necessity to meet the target indicators of the priority project “Developing the Export Potential of the Russian Education System,” the implementation of decisions to deepen the humanitarian aspect of Russian–Chinese cooperation, and improvement of the efficiency of Russia’s migration policy to the current reformatting of the system of international relations and the existing world order.

Academic mobility is a bright characteristic of the modern world and an important indicator of global migration processes. While in 1990 there were about 1.9 mln students studying abroad, by 2011 their number had doubled, and in 2016 (the latest data available in 2019) they were almost 4.9 mln. The findings of

RAS Corresponding Member, Professor Sergey Vasil’evich Ryazantsev, Dr. Sci. (Econ.), is Head of the Department of Demographic and Migration Policy at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (University) (MGIMO (U)), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, and Director of the Institute of Socio-Political Research of the Federal Center of Theoretical and Applied Sociology, RAS (ISPR FCTAS RAS). Professor Sergey Mikhailovich Shakhray, Dr. Sci. (Law), is a Vice Rector of Moscow State University and Head of the Center of Legal Support for Socio-Political Processes, ISPR FCTAS RAS. Andrey Aleksandrovich Yanik, Cand. Sci. (Comput.), is a Leading Researcher at ISPR FCTAS RAS. Svetlana Mikhailovna Popova, Cand. Sci. (Polit.), is a Leading Researcher at ISPR FCTAS RAS.

international monitoring research show that, by the results of 2017, 5.1 mln students studied outside of their countries [1]. In addition, the total global market of educational services (including the services of primary, secondary, and continuing education) has been growing sustainably at an average annual rate of 7–8% and, according to experts, has reached \$1.9 trillion, exceeding the healthcare exports market.

The phenomenon of academic mobility may be considered in various projections as it is associated with questions of education internationalization and export of educational services, various aspects of foreign policy, international cooperation, migration, and tourism, as well as with subjects of political influence, cross-cultural contacts, cross-border circulation of knowledge, the formation of a positive image of educational destinations,¹ and many other areas. Therefore, it is no wonder that issues related to the study of various aspects of academic mobility in general and Russian–Chinese educational relations in particular are actively developing in the subject field of social sciences [2–10].

Specialized research helps ensure the necessary depth and detail in the analysis of various sides of Russian–Chinese academic mobility. However, it seems that better understanding and volumetric vision of the characteristics of this multidimensional phenomenon, as well as a reliable forecast of its functional effects in the global and national contexts, need a transdisciplinary approach. This approach will make it possible to assess, for example, how decisions made within the paradigm of economic efficiency can tell on the condition of cultural or foreign relations and the fulfillment of local tasks affecting the transformation of long-term strategies.

Russia and China in the global market of educational services. In 2018, the number of foreigners studying in Russia was over 313 000 people (5.7% of the total number of all Russian students), and that in the PRC, over 506 400 (1.1% of the total number of all Chinese students) [11]. The annual growth rate of the number of foreign students reach, by various data, 4.7–9.0% in Russia and 10.5–11.4% in the PRC [12–14]. Taking 6 and 10% of the total international market for higher education, Russia and China² aim at further expansion of the export of educational services. Thus, according to the indicators of the priority project “Developing the Export Potential of the Russian Education System,” the number of foreign students study-

ing in full-time programs in Russian organizations of secondary vocational and higher education should grow from 240 000 people in 2018 to 310 000 by 2020 (1.3 times) and to 710 000 by 2025 (three times). In addition, extrabudgetary funds obtained from the export of Russian education should increase almost four times by 2025, from P96.2 bln to P373.2 bln [15].

Since the time when China officially recognized the concept of mutual dependence between economic growth and education back in the mid-1980s [16], the country’s educational system has seen large-scale changes, the growth rates of which are constantly growing. During the period 2007–2017 alone, the total number of PRC universities grew by 38%, from 1908 in 2007 to 2631 in 2017, and the number of Chinese students who went to study abroad grew almost 2.3 times over the same period, from 195 500 to 442 800. As China becomes a major customer in the international market for educational services, an opposing movement is forming, when higher education institutions of other countries, primarily leading foreign universities (including Russian universities), strive to disseminate their activities and influence on continental China. Despite the declared openness, China is wary and shows selectivity admitting foreign universities onto its territory. The current Chinese legislation envisages only one possible legal form for such cooperation: a *partnership* between Chinese residents and a foreign participant (*Sino–foreign cooperative joint venture*). From the 2000s until now, various levels of organization of transnational education within such partnerships have appeared:

- *the university level* (an independent legal status of a new higher education institution, its own campus, and administration);
- *the institutional level* (a branch of a foreign university in an already existing Chinese higher education institution);
- *the program level* (joint education delivery programs of certain levels).

As of 2018, nine joint universities, 66 branches of foreign universities, and 894 joint educational programs operated in China. The campuses of all joint universities are located on the southeastern coast of China. The first Russian project of this kind was MSU–BIT University in Shenzhen,³ established by Moscow State University, Beijing Institute of Technology (University), and Shenzhen Municipal People’s Government. Table 1 gives a summary on the current Sino–foreign joint university ventures.

Russian–Chinese academic mobility: key indicators.

According to international surveys, the Russian Federation occupies ninth place among the most preferable educational destinations of Chinese students (Table 2). However, many times fewer Chinese citi-

¹ An educational destination (by analogy with “tourist destination”) is a geographical place (country, region, territorial complex) that attracts foreign students by its conditions (valuable educational products, convenient infrastructure, comfortable legal and information environment, effective management and logistics, etc.) favorable for meeting their main needs in higher education.

² China holds third place in the world in its share of the global market for educational services after the United States (24%) and Great Britain (11%).

³ Detailed information is available on the official site of MSU–BIT University in Shenzhen: <http://szmsubit.ru>.

Table 1. Chinese universities with joint foreign partners (partnerships) located on PRC territory

University	Beginning of work, year	Location (city, province)	Teaching languages	Tuition, \$/year*	Cost of living, \$/month*
University of Nottingham Ningbo China	2004	Ningbo, Zhejiang	English	13200	298
Beijing Normal University–Hong Kong Baptist University United International College	2005	Zhuhai, Guangdong	English	11940	446–746
Xi'an Jiaotong–Liverpool University	2006	Sinzhou, Jiangsu	English	11492	328
New York University Shanghai	2011	Shanghai	English	14925	119–209
Wenzhou–Kean University	2011	Wenzhou, Zhejiang	English	6716	746
Duke Kunshan University	2013	Kunshan, Jiangsu	English	3641	1194
The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen	2014	Shenzhen, Guangdong	English	14179	179
Guangdong Technion–Israel Institute of Technology	2016	Shantou, Guangdong	English	14197	179
Shenzhen MSU–BIT University	2017	Shenzhen, Guangdong	Chinese, English, Russian	5970	239

* USD/CNY exchange rate = 6.70.

zens come to Russia for study than to the United States (15.6 times), Canada (six times), Australia (five times), or Great Britain (4.3 times).

At the nineteenth meeting of the Russian–Chinese Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation (October 30, 2018, Beijing), the parties signed the minutes of the 18th meeting of the Russian–Chinese Subcommittee on Cooperation in Education and agreed to increase the exchange of students to 100 000 people by 2020, as well as to expand interuniversity cooperation. The above indicator was practically reached. As was noted in the documents of the 20th meeting of the commission (September 16, 2019, St. Petersburg), in 2018, 19 000 Russians studied in China and over 39 000 Chinese citizens studied in Russia. Overall, the exchange within academic mobility of citizens of the two countries in educational programs has already exceeded 90 000 people [17].

Comparison of official information on Russian–Chinese student exchanges and statistics on mutual tourist trips (Table 3) reveal a paradoxical trend. The average annual growth rates of the Chinese tourist flow to Russia are gradually slowing down, and the growth rates of the number of students who come to study are increasing. As for Russia, the picture is the opposite: the contingent of Russian students in China is expanding less actively, while China is becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination from year to year. The gross annual growth rate (GAGR) of the number of tourist trips of Russian citizens to China in 2015–2017 was 16%, and that of Chinese citizens to Russia, 9.7%. As for the number of student exchanges, their GAGR in the 2015/2016 and 2017/2018 aca-

demic years was 3.8% for the Russian contingent in China and 10.2% for the Chinese contingent in Russia.

Attractiveness of the Russian educational destination for Chinese citizens. There are many academic papers that analyze the reasons for which Chinese students choose Russia to receive education. Among the positive characteristics mentioned are the quality of Russian education, especially in technical disciplines; geographical attractiveness (closeness to northeastern regions of China, the beauty of nature, fresh air, open spaces); and the kindness of Russians [19–21]. How-

Table 2. Preferences of Chinese students in choosing educational destinations in 2018 [11]

Host country	Number of Chinese students
United States	350 734
Canada	132 345
Australia	114 008
Great Britain	97 850
Japan	75 262
Germany	32 368
New Zealand	31 075
France	25 388
Russian Federation	22 529
Netherlands	4 347
Sweden	2 374
Finland	2 332

Table 3. Dynamics of mutual tourist trips of Russian and Chinese citizens [18, pp. 162, 163]

Indicator	2015	2016	2017
Tourist trips of Russian citizens to China, thousand	1284	1676	2003
Total trips of Russian citizens abroad, thousand	34 390	31 659	39 629
Share of the Chinese destination in total trips of Russian citizens abroad, %	3.7	5.3	5.1
Tourist trips of Chinese citizens to Russia, thousand	1122	1289	1478
Total trips of foreign citizens to Russia, thousand	2652	24 571	24 390
Share of China in total trips of foreign citizens to Russia, %	4.2	5.2	6.1

Table 4. Average tuition in the higher educational systems of Russia, China, and Great Britain

Types of educational services	Average cost, \$		
	Russia*	China**	Great Britain***
Qualification, per year			
Bachelor	3000–3340	2200–3500	12900–17000
Specialist	3340–3670	–	–
Master	3670–4000	3000–5000	9500–11000
Candidate of Sciences (PhD)	4000–4370	2700–8500	12000–13500
Specialties, per year			
Natural sciences and technologies	3900–4200	2900–5300	16800–20000
Liberal arts	3000	1700–4100	15000–16500
Law	5200	7000–12 000	15400–17500
Business and management	3000–8500	3000–5000	13900–15400
Medicine	4170–4500	4000–8200	18000–48000
Additional services			
Preparatory department, per year	2000	4200	8000–13000
Thematic summer schools, 4–6 weeks	330–830	540–800	2900–4900
Average cost of living, per month, \$			
	30–45	300–500	800–1400
Material assistance and social benefits, \$			
Maintenance allowance, per week	n/a	n/a	n/a
Scholarship****, per month	25	476	n/a

Official data on tuition and the costs of related services for foreign students and postgraduate students of the Russian Ministry of Defense (project Study in Russia) and PRC universities included in the Times Higher Education BRICS Rankings 2018. Data on tuition in the EU for foreign students from non-EU-member countries are taken from the independent British *The Complete University Guide*. Currency exchange rates of the Russian Federation, PRC, and Great Britain to the US dollar (USD/RUB, USD/CNY, and USD/GBP) were used as of March–April 2018.

* Depending on the category of higher educational institution and specialty.

** Depending on teaching in Chinese or English and specialty.

*** The cost of living and tuition in London universities is about 25–40% higher than in other parts of the country.

**** When meeting several requirements.

ever, tuition plays a decisive role, which is generally comparable for Russia and China but several times lower than in, e.g., Great Britain (Table 4).

Besides tuition paid, Russia and China, as well as several other states, implement support programs for talented students. According to the priority project “Developing the Export Potential of the Russian Education System,” the Russian Federation envisaged the

annual allocation of 15000 state scholarships to foreign students between 2017 and 2025, the awarding of which (by competition) involves no tuition, free accommodation (if possible), and the payment of a standard state scholarship. In 2019, such an average scholarship was ₱1484 (about \$22) per month.

In China, a similar state program (the Government Scholarship for the Chinese University Program and

the Silk Road Program) for non-Chinese students envisages an exemption from tuition, living fees, full medical insurance, and the payment of a monthly scholarship. The Chinese Government Scholarship Foreign Medical Insurance is about \$95 per year; if a student stays longer than a year, he or she will additionally need an examination in a state medical institution before graduation (\$95). A one-time resettlement allowance is also about \$100.

The functioning mechanisms of the Russian and Chinese programs to support talented students, compared to other countries, are simpler and more understandable. For example, Great Britain has a complex system of loans, grants, state and nongovernmental scholarships, and scholarship programs of individual universities due to high tuition and living fees even for its own students and students from the European Union. As for support for talented foreign students by the British educational system, special scholarship programs exist for this as well,⁴ part of them specialized exclusively to attract Chinese citizens.⁵

According to our analysis, the factor of the attractive cost of Russian educational products reveals itself in a dual way. Formally, an affordable tuition fee improves the competitive advantages of the Russian destination in the global market for educational services. However, consideration of the situation in a wider context shows that low-cost education in Russia is not decisive for prospective applicants.

Chinese economic growth has made expensive educational programs affordable for many more Chinese youngsters. Therefore, “study in Russia is the choice of school graduates with weak certificates and children from low-income families” [22, p. 42], as well as those who were unable to pass entrance examinations to highly rated prestigious universities in China itself, the United States, or Western Europe. Surveys also show that Chinese students who are positive toward education in Russia do not consider it a suitable and comfortable place for living after graduation from the university and do not associate their future with work in Russia [20, p. 41].

Thus, a formal increase in the number of Chinese students in Russian universities is not directly associated with an improved attractiveness of the Russian educational system in the eyes of Chinese society; rather, the opposite is true. It seems that more reliable evidence of the growing competitiveness of Russian

education could be an integrated indicator, showing, e.g., how many foreign students remained in Russia “to move science” or “to do business,” and how many foreign graduates from Russian universities were in demand as highly qualified specialists globally or in their home countries, received prestigious scientific and professional prizes, etc. However, this approach would require qualitative changes in the system of statistical observations at all levels, to say nothing of the fact that the improved value of Russian diplomas in the world is directly related to improvements in the domestic science and innovation ecosystem, business development, improving the level and quality of life—all those factors on which the attractiveness of the Russian development model depends and, consequently, Russia’s global competitiveness. As the “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation” emphasizes, at present, for the first time in recent history, global competition has acquired a civilizational dimension, implying competition between various value orientations and development models [23].

Talent retention problem. Unlike Russia, China, alongside Canada, Germany, and Japan, is among the countries that aim not only at increasing the number of foreign students but also at retaining them in their labor markets. Several large Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai, and Shenzhen) have implemented complex regional measures to include foreign graduates into retraining programs and create additional job opportunities for them (especially for high-tech and e-commerce specialists).

During the past decade, China implemented the Thousand Talents Program, designed to facilitate the return of Chinese scientists who had achieved exceptional results abroad to the country, to support national talents, and attract the best foreign specialists. The program includes three areas:

- the Innovative 1000 Talents plan: long- and short-term support programs for Chinese scientists under the age of 55;
- the Foreign 1000 Talents plan: long- and short-term programs to attract foreign scientists under the age of 55;
- the Young Scholar 1000 Talents plan: support programs for scientists under the age of 40.

Analysts note, “China is interested in brain gain from around the world, having funds for that and ready to create attractive conditions for talents” [24]. Nevertheless, the results of the program at this moment are assessed as dual: China has learned to attract world famous scientists to the country but has not reached the desired indicators in retaining both foreigners and fellow countrymen who studied and made careers abroad. Thus, specialists who returned received everything they needed to transfer knowledge and expertise acquired in other countries without problems, but their own professional development at home was asso-

⁴ Chevening Scholarships for International Students is a major program that annually envisages 1500 scholarships for prospective foreigners to be qualified as masters. It includes the full annual tuition in the chosen university, a monthly allowance, and a paid roundtrip air ticket anywhere in the world.

⁵ For example, the Great Britain China Center, a nonprofit charity organization, offers by competition the Chinese Student Awards one-time scholarship of \$2100–\$4200 only for post-graduate students from China. Several British universities provide special scholarships for Chinese students (usually 50% of their annual training costs).

ciated with several difficulties [25]. Comprehensive analysis of Chinese problems in this sphere could be useful for Russia in terms of the further improvement of the program, highly praised in the world, to attract leading scientists to Russian universities and scientific organizations using the megagrant mechanism [26].

Education as a tool of influence. As was noted above, the phenomenon of academic mobility cannot be considered apart from the issue of foreign policy influence and from the actively developing “knowledge diplomacy.” Researchers note dualism of international cooperation in the sphere of higher education. Figuratively speaking, academic ties, as well as humanitarian interaction in general, are “dual-use technologies,” because, along with deepening mutual understanding and developing friendship and cooperation between nations, it is always a targeted cultural influence to form positive attitudes among citizens of one country to the way of life, people, and policy of another country [27–29].

As for China, all areas of activity and programs in humanitarian cooperation implemented by this country are characterized by internal unity and close interrelationships, because they are a set of tools to solve strategic tasks associated with a higher status and authority of China in the international arena. Among these tools is cultural diplomacy, based on Sino–foreign cooperation in higher education (the global network of Confucius Institutes), programs of international assistance in the development of higher education, and programs of attracting foreign students to Chinese universities [30].

Many countries, including the Russian Federation, implement a similar “knowledge diplomacy” strategy. However, there is a fine line between mutually beneficial cooperation and “pushing” one’s own interests. From this point of view, it is necessary to analyze attentively the institutional and substantial development of Russian–Chinese relations in the humanitarian dimension to determine the limits of the permissible use of educational contacts as a “soft power” tool and unconditional exclusion of any possibilities of turning educational cooperation into a channel for conducting a “sharp power” policy. The term *sharp power* entered the political discourse not long ago and is used to fix forms of foreign policy associated with harsh manipulation of public opinion in the affected countries.⁶ If soft power is “winning hearts and minds,” sharp power is propaganda and manipulation [31].

Considering the above, the assessment of the results of the Chinese project of the global network of Confucius Institutes on Russian territory seems controversial. Confucius Institutes and Confucius classes are a network of cultural-and-educational centers,

which the Office of the Chinese Language Council International of the Chinese Ministry of Education (Hanban) has been building since 2004 on the basis of universities in various countries. China considers this project as a major component of promotion of its cultural and educational policy abroad, a propaganda tool of Chinese national values and a positive image of China. In 2018, 548 Confucius Institutes and 1193 Confucius classes operated in 154 countries, in which nearly 1.9 mln people studied. According to various data, about 20 Confucius Institutes (the first was founded in 2007) and five Confucius schools operate in the Russian Federation [32]. Note also that, in 2017, the Federal Service for Supervision of Education and Science tested a model of state final certification of programs for basic general and secondary general education in the Chinese language, and from 2019, the Chinese language will be included in the Russian Unified State Examination (USE).

Formally, we are speaking about mirror processes associated with the creation of an infrastructure of Russian–Chinese humanitarian cooperation (friendship societies, culture centers, funds). An intergovernmental agreement on the study of the Russian language in China and the Chinese language in the Russian Federation was signed back in 2005 [33], and questions of mutual support of Confucius Institutes in Russia and Russian language centers in China have constantly been discussed since 2007 at meetings of the standing Russian–Chinese Intergovernmental Commission on Humanitarian Cooperation. However, gaps in legal regulation and the shortage of content control over the activities of Confucius Institutes on Russian territory contain risks of turning these entities into a tool of pursuing Chinese interests. Note, in particular, that, to open a Confucius Institute within a Russian university, an agreement with a Chinese partner is required, and the above Hanban agency approves the agreement after a thorough assessment of prospects without approval by Russian official structures. The Confucius Institutes are directly funded from China [32].

The activities of Confucius Institutes are harshly criticized in the world, and some governments have begun to close them. The main reasons are the low level of teaching Chinese, noncompliance with educational standards, the introduction of ideological concepts of China’s role in the world, the desire to create an alternative Sinology, and the formation of a pro-Chinese lobby. The Chinese party uses Confucius Institutes to form associates loyal to its policies in foreign universities and independently selects promising students, directly providing them with scholarships. Thus, an alternative and uncontrolled tool of influence on citizens of another country is created institutionally. A characteristic illustration is the fact that currently Confucius Institutes are the only place in Russia to pass a qualified examination in Chinese, and

⁶ This term was first used in 2017 in a report of the American National Endowment for Democracy entitled “Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence.”

the personal data of the examinees are obligatorily sent to China.

As the project of Confucius Institutes is part of diplomatic arrangements and an element of the infrastructure of Russian–Chinese humanitarian cooperation, they will continue to develop. However, it is obvious that this process should be duly regulated, based on the interests of the Russian party. In particular, it is expedient to offer China to continue to develop the network of Confucius Institutes in Russia through a program council, specially established for this purpose, which should include representatives of the ministries of education of both countries, as well as representatives of leading universities, specialists on China, and methodologists in Chinese. The activities of Confucius Institutes on Russian territory should be carried out strictly within the framework of Russian national legislation (similarly to MSU–BIT University in Shenzhen that operates under national Chinese laws). Obviously, it is also necessary to control funding, which comes from the Chinese party to Russian residents, considering the current legislation, including the possible extension of the provisions of the Federal Law of July 20, 2012, no. 121-FZ, On Amendments to Separate Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on the Regulation of Activities of Nonprofit Organizations That Function as a Foreign Agent.

Competitive partnership. Analysis shows that Russian–Chinese cooperation in various areas, including the development of mutual academic mobility, are characterized not only by complexity but also by a certain duality, because, leaving aside the unanimity in assessing the importance of strategic partnership between Russian and China and the strengthening of friendship and good neighborliness, there remain problems of mismatching (and often even opposing interests of the other party) ideas of the goals and methods of implementing the decisions made. Therefore, experts often say that Russian and Chinese ties are characterized by “hot” relations between the governments and “cold” relations between the peoples [34, 35].

It seems that the conceptual basis for complex strategies in developing bilateral cooperation with China in general and educational ties in particular may be the model of *competitive partnership*, which consistently describes the interaction between Russia and China.

The term *competitive partnership* is actively used in modern economic science, which analyzes evolutionary processes of the competitive principle in a “deeply interrelated world.” Competition itself is known to be a systemic, multilevel, and dynamic phenomenon, the universal theory of which claims to be an independent field of scientific knowledge [36–38]. At the macrolevel, the competitive principle forms relations that determine the parameters of the entire system of the market economy; at the mesolevel, it sets mechanisms of interaction between market agents; and at the microlevel, it determines ways of implementing com-

petitors’ economic goals. The effects of globalization and digital revolution not only change deeply the characteristics of productive forces, competing agents, and the conditions of their competition but also modify the competitive principle itself [39–41]. As a result, struggle and confrontation are replaced with a trend of developing a competitive partnership, based on cooperative solidarity of competing economic agents. Within this communication, competition unites with the mutual assistance and cooperation of the parties.

Diverse aspects of complex interactions between Russia and China in various spheres show that the competition of a competitive partnership most fully defines not only the principles but also the strategy of the current Russian–Chinese relations.

Note that a similar conceptual approach but for somewhat different goals (for the development of possible measures to restore strategic trust between the United States and China, ruined by the trade war) was proposed by the Chinese party in the fall of 2018 at a conference of the Peterson Institute for International Economics [42]. The leaders of the European Union reasoned around the same paradigm on a model of building relations with China. For example, European Commission President J.-C. Juncker noted that China and Europe are both strategic partners and rivals, but “competition among us is a good thing” [43].

The use of competitive partnership ideas for a deeper understanding of driving mechanisms and the conceptualization of diverse contacts between Russia and China make it possible to assess objectively the strong and weak positions of our countries in bilateral projects, as well as in the wider context of interaction in the global arena. The presence of elements of cooperation and integration in Russian–Chinese relations does not exclude the implementation of individual strategies aimed at gain in competition.

Individual elements of the proposed approach can be found in various official documents of the Russian Federation, reflecting the vision of prospects for the development of Russian–Chinese relations. Thus, the passport of the priority project “Developing the Export Potential of the Russian Education System” indicates high-degree competition as an implementation risk not only with Western but also with Chinese educational institutions. This risk should be warned by measures such as the following:

- (1) the diversification of regional and country destinations of Russian educational exports considering demographic, socioeconomic, historicocultural, and geopolitical factors, as well as labor markets and the Russian economy and politics;
- (2) the formation of new proposals and forms of educational services, competitive and sought after in the education market;
- (3) the stimulation of initiatives and competitive projects of Russian universities to recruit foreign students [15].

However, this document does not answer the question of the desirable target action model. Should Russia avoid competition with China, focusing on Russian educational exports still untapped for some reason by China? Or is it necessary to compete directly with Chinese educational establishments and programs? Perhaps, it is more important to pool efforts with China to oust other players in the struggle for a share in the global market for educational services? Obviously, all these are different tasks, which require different strategies and tactics.

Among *positive factors* of Russia's concept of competitive partnership when developing the strategy and tactics in relations with China in higher education is primarily the growth of mutual trust, which itself is a valuable resource at all levels in bilateral relations. In the economy of education, the implementation of the competitive partnership concept opens up opportunities for economies of scale and increases the value of educational products and the general efficiency of national education markets, stimulating the purchase of additional products and services. Another consequence is the growing efficiency of budgetary expenditures, because the amount of investments necessary to create new sustainable markets of educational products and services and to support their providers should decrease for the Russian party. Moreover, the creation of competitive partnerships among players in the global market stimulates processes that internationalize systems of higher education and improve their competitive potential.

What are the *necessary and sufficient conditions* for benefiting from a partnership? A competitive partnership functions efficiently when the partners acknowledge that they share each other's values and are united in understanding strategic goals but do not intend to limit individual successes in the competitive sphere. A partnership is profitable to the partners if one by one they are unable to compete with the market leaders. The partners realize their *interdependence* as a major condition for long-term and mutually beneficial cooperation. Also necessary are special procedures to maintain trust (in unavoidable conflicts) and prevent the degeneration of partnership relations. A partnership of competitors assumes that the partners value the opportunity to learn from each other, are ready to contribute meaningfully to cooperation, but at the same time observe the principle of mutuality and are able to control (and limit) access to products and technologies the transfer of which may damage the competitive potential of the donor country.

The coordinates outlined do not limit the model of target partnership between Russia and China in higher education to indicators of academic exchanges and should take into account educational products, regulatory measures, and institutional opportunities. Strategies of development of Russian–Chinese cooperation in higher education should be built to amplify

the potential of the Russian Federation and China in competition with other players in the global market for educational services but at the same time exclude any possible violations of the national interests of each other (“brain gain,” technology theft, industrial espionage, etc.).

The history of the establishment and functioning of Russian–Chinese MSU–BIT University in Shenzhen seems to represent a unique opportunity for a deep probe into the specifics of practical implementation of the principles of a competitive partnership between two countries in higher education [44]. Designed to be “an effective platform to share experience and choose innovative ways of development of educational processes” and also a supplier of highly skilled personnel “to implement joint programs on cooperation in a wide range of destinations,” [45] the university operates in the territory of a dynamically developing high-tech area (fourth place in China by GDP), where the Chinese party forms a powerful educational cluster of world-level universities. In particular, joint higher education institutions have been created here based on the universities of California (Berkeley), Rochester (United States), Melbourne and Queensland (Australia), Copenhagen (Denmark), and higher education institutions of other countries. The joint universities will work in the face of fierce competition. In fact, the Shenzhen educational cluster is a minimodel of a global market where Russian educational programs directly compete with Western programs. In this situation, the success and reputation of the Russian educational model will depend not so much on its content and quality as on the correctly built relations with the Chinese party.

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The first integrated research into the specifics of Russian–Chinese educational cooperation and academic mobility shows that it is a complex and dynamically changing phenomenon, the influence of which goes far beyond bilateral relations in the sphere of higher education and science. Analysis of a large array of documents, as well as statistical and empirical data, leads to the conclusion that factors such as the lack of volumetric vision of what is happening, the unsuccessful decomposition of strategic goals into specific tasks, and enthusiasm for process and project management approaches do not allow one to identify quickly the potential risks and unfavorable trends for Russia in the sphere considered. The existing target model of development of Russian–Chinese academic mobility, based on quantitative indicators, disregards the meaningful specifics of the process and is insufficiently harmonized with the solutions to other, no less important, tasks associated with the pursuit of the interests of the Russian Federation in the international arena and the achievement of goals of our country's national development.

The lack of systemic scientific ideas of the essentially transdisciplinary phenomenon of educational migration has led to the fact that processes managed within international cooperation in higher education, the export of educational services, and the stimulation of academic mobility are distributed among and dissolved in various areas of state policy: foreign, migrational, educational, scientific-innovative, labor, etc., despite the importance of the integrated approach declared in official documents.⁷

We suggest that the phenomenon of Russian–Chinese educational cooperation is considered as a *competitive partnership*, and we tried to demonstrate reasonably in this article that the concept of competitive partnership can be efficient not only as an explanatory model but also as a practical philosophy and a general principle of relations between two countries. This conceptual approach is relevant not only for scientific theory but also for the practice of public administration: its use creates the basis for the improvement of target models and strategies for the Russian Federation in developing the humanitarian dimension of Russian–Chinese relations.

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⁷ For example, the passport of the priority project “Developing the Export Potential of the Russian Education System” indicates that the state migration policy affects significantly the choice of the country of education, as well as the improvement of legislation to enhance the transparency of administrative procedures for foreign applicants [15, pp. 7, 8].

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