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Quality of professional education in China – problems and prospects (On example of Changsha university of Science and Technology, Hunan Province, Changsha)

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the one of the urgent problems of international educational society, quality and volume of educational services provided to foreign students within government projects of China. The article deals with mechanisms for the implementation of ideas, principles and directions, forming the basis of models for the educational environment in China. It is revealed the ambiguity of the definition of the concept «quality» and priority mechanisms in determining it. The opinion poll of faculty and students at the University of Science and Technology enabled to disclose a number of problems and gaps in educational system of the University and make college rankings, prioritize the choice of foreign students of geographical educational directions. The need of development of export potential on the Russian market of educational services and the necessity of changes in government regulation are identified in the article.

Keywords: educational policy, quality of education, educational services market, ratings, student mobility, mutual cooperation, competence

«If I had to look for the great culture in the full sense of this word, first and foremost I would point to Chinese culture»¹.

Due to dynamic development of international relations between Russia and China it is necessary to pay a special attention to the problems of studying of Chinese language in nonlingual Universities.

Strengthening of political, economical and cultural relations between both states cause a necessity of training of high-level specialists, not only in terms of professional training, but also oriented communicative competence in Chinese language;

- Chinese, as a foreign language, isn't practically studied in the school system in Russia, like other European languages, as well as in China Russian language is not very popular. Ministry of Higher Education of the Chinese People's Republic within the policy of openness and technological modernization of the country pursues the policy, aimed at increasing the number of foreign students in Chinese universities. During the last decade the number of foreign students enrolled in various programs,

including language courses, increased almost six-fold, and for the period from 1978 - nearly 200 times².

Similar rates of influx of foreign students have no analogues in the world. Considering, that measuring of quality in higher education is difficult, and direct measures are circumstantial - using of different techniques makes the comparability of results and doubts about the impartiality and reliability of assessing the quality of educational services provided to foreign students.

That is why the most objective indicators are the level of funding, number of faculty members, research and innovation resources, participating in the educational process, although they don't give they do not give an idea of the extent to which these opportunities are realized. One of the indirect signs of the quality of education is demand of the high requirements to the participants of the educational process – both the teachers and the students.

Let's try to understand, why China, being, first of all, the largest consumer of foreign educational services, have become one of the leaders for international education, ahead Russia and other European countries, which are traditionally considered as providers of high quality classical education, and what is the prospects for a Russian student, who have decided to obtain higher education in China. According to the Center for Strategic Studies of China, China's leadership sees education as an important factor to bring the country one of the leading world powers and by 2010, plans to bring 10 Chinese universities in the top 100 universities of the world³.

Today, 30 Chinese universities and only 2 Russian universities are parts of the rating «Top 500 Asia», and on set of factors in world ratings the Chinese high schools occupy 18 place.

Also the representative offices of the largest educational associations have been opened in China (British Council, American Council, Alliance Francaise, the Goethe Institute and others). Russia does not have similar centers in China, thought Chinese universities repeatedly offered to open on its basis Russian language courses to select students in Russia.

² About state, principles, perspectives, and forms of cooperation with Chinese educational institutions / National Resource Center to support the Russian-Chinese Educational Cooperation, Center for Strategic Studies of China [www.chinacentre.ru]

³ About state, principles, perspectives, and forms of cooperation with Chinese educational institutions / National Resource Center to support the Russian-Chinese Educational Cooperation, Center for Strategic Studies of China [www.chinacentre.ru]

¹ Yan Jianli, Jian Jiang. «Heart to heart talks» of V. V. Putin with students of the Beijing University // Puzin yui beida xuesheng “cinmi zechu” // Beijing zingnian bao”. (04.12.2002).

As Russian universities practically don't use the Internet-resources for the intake of Chinese students, the rating of education of Chinese students occupies 7 – 8 places on popularity.

The People Republic of China allocates the big means for attraction of foreign students, and the share of financial support to the Chinese high schools from the State grows proportionally to quantity of trained foreign citizens. In 2008, 200.503 foreigners studied in the People Republic of China, and it is planned to bring this quantity to 500 thousand people.

The Government of the People Republic of China only in 2008 has allocated 73 million dollars for state scholarships, and annually raises this section of financing of education.

Besides training, compulsory medical insurance, providing a standard dormitory and the right to use the funds of school libraries and reading rooms are the components of material security. In the educational context between Russia and China new tendencies are recently traversed: the Russian universities have the largest number of cooperation agreements, thought executed by less than ¼, the countries have exchanged three centers of learning Russian and Chinese languages, 2009 was declared as a year of Russian language in China, 2010 is a year of Chinese language in Russia.

Chinese language to varying extents are taught in more than a hundred Russian high schools, but the quantity of centers for training of sinologists and professional experts hasn't increased, they are still lacking in the Russian authorities and companies.

At this level, state-funded Centers for strategic study of Russia, making the Russian themes in more than 40 Chinese Universities, are regarded very positively.

Academic mobility of students' interchange is pathological: Chinese students come to Russia for full term courses and are recruiting by special agencies. Russian students in 85 % of cases go to language trainings (for a year) through the direct connection of Russian Universities and from the Chinese side there are some training limits in basic specialties, while Chinese students after studying the language receive training in specialty.

Also at training at language courses Russian students have some limitations, such as using the Internet-resources, library funds, and limiting their ability to visit additional lectures on interesting courses at their free time.

It should be noted that the most massive educational influence on Russia by China in promoting their views and approaches in the sphere of Russian-Chinese relations began since 2010: expanding the network of Confucius Institutes, whose purpose is promoting Chinese language and national values; opening some of the largest China's Russian-language portal, on-line broadcasting in Russian on the central channels of Chinese TV.

The concept «much» not always corresponds to concept «qualitatively». It is due to expansive growth of educational programs and massive increase in number of students, Chinese experts speak about the quality of education anxiously, proposing and estimating various options for the impact on the learning process:

«Dramatic increase of Bachelors» contingent allowed China to enter the era of mass higher education. Taking into account the rising skepticism in the community about the quality of higher education after the expansion, the Ministry of Education announced the project «Quality and reform in

teaching and learning in a baccalaureate», which is supported and sponsored by the Ministries of Education and Finance in 2007»⁴.

This project has received strong support from the academics of China, but it is unclear «how much educational institutions could involve, motivate and support teachers in the course of reform»⁵;

The system of higher education in China consists of formal programs (in ordinary institutes and institutes offered adult education) and flexible forms (on-line education and preparatory courses for exams which provide a formal qualification). This research is focused on regular higher education because it has extended much faster, than adult higher education and flexible forms of training in higher education and accumulate 70 % of universal enrollment of students in 2008»⁶.

Analyzing intellectual level, the researchers concluded that Chinese children have the highest rate in mathematical calculations, their level of imagination is on the lowest place, and creativity is also on very low level (the fifth place from the end).

Chinese pupils and students in poll, conducted by the American organization for international assessment of educational progress in 21 countries, only 4,7 % believe that they have curiosity and imagination and only 14, 9 % of students want to develop such qualities in themselves⁷.

Taking into account a stiff competition among pupils and students, it should be noted, that psychological pressure is very high due to the fact that the education system is built on the ready-made answers that need to be learnt.

That is why the problems of education in the country smoothly move on the level of teaching science for international students.

According to survey in Changsha University of Science and Technology, Hunan province, in December, 2010, seven of nine respondents indicated that quality of education is assessed as good, but on condition that, it is necessary to adjust the personal curriculum for teaching foreign students, because many of them, arriving in China for educating, begin to do business and do not always attend classes and loyalty of administration to foreigners does not allow teachers to toughen the responsibility of students for training programs provided for general educational plans; as respondents notice that the teaching level is not always high because not all teachers know English perfectly, that's why they not always can to inform about the subject correctly. All participants of poll noted the necessity of increase in financing of Universities by the state.

Monitoring of quality, conducted by the University Assessment Office, regulates certain requirements and self-

⁴ Ki Lee. Search of quality in higher education // International Higher Education. - № 57, Fall 2009. [http://ihe.nkaoko.kz/archive/ihe60/3]

⁵ Ki Lee. In search of quality in higher education // International Higher Education. -№ 57, Fall 2009. [http://ihe.nkaoko.kz/archive/ihe60/3]

⁶ Jian Liu. Expansion and differentiation in higher education of China // International Higher Education. - № 57, Fall 2009. [electronic resource: http://ihe.nkaoko.kz/archive/ihe60/3]

⁷ Arefiev A. L. Russian students in Chinese universities // Demoscope Weekly. - № 441-442, 1-4 November 2010 [http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2010/0441/analit03.php]

training of academic staff after which wages of teachers are set.

All participants of research have come to the University after work in schools and additional trainings, provided in the context of state projects on improvement of professional skills of teachers. The University has two campuses, in the first campus (newly built) the students with graduates with high level of knowledge, defined in the process of passing tests and examinations, study, the first campus has a more modern scientific and technical base and a more experienced teaching staff with higher paid labor.

The other student, who have got lower marks, and international students (mainly from Asia, Africa and students from Russia, also conducted training programs for MBA) study in the second campus.

In the sociological poll of students conducted during the period from December, 2010 till February, 2011, 111 persons have taken part, among them there were representatives of Liberia, Angola, Pakistan, Equatorial Guinea, China, Hungary, Australia, America, Kazakhstan, and Russia.

Representatives of African countries and Russia answered the question of why they have chosen the education in China answered that they were sent for training by state, and they did not have choice, students from Australia, arrived for the target programs funded by various educational foundations, the rest arrived for training at their account or by firms of employers, and link their future career with the Chinese economy.

All students noted that after training in China they want to continue studying at home or in Europe, as far as possible, because they consider that the education received in China insufficient for further career development. All students, participating in the study, noted that the situation in the office, at university and in places of accommodation (student residences) they like, although fairly Spartan, everything needed to live and study there, the atmosphere among the students and friendly that it has to communicate and development of relationships.

All respondents, participating in the survey (except one Russian student), highly appreciated their relations with Chinese teachers, and recognized their high level of competence in the teaching of disciplines.

Students noted that they haven't got an opportunity to participate in scientific work (undergraduates and bachelor – 12 people). It was noted the high level of personal security, freedom of movement and travel in the country. When asked how, often would you like to come back here – the students answered: as soon as possible.

Taking into account that China is our the closest neighbor not only in terms of geographical location, but also as partner in environmental natural resources, a partner in the

development of joint business, aimed at improving the welfare of the two states, as well as considering the integration of Chinese economy in all spheres of social and productive activities in Russia – Russian education associations must focus its efforts on training of good specialists in the field of sinology, which, after training would be prepared to work in the field of mutual cooperation for the benefit of the Russian state.

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