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## CHINA–AZERBAIJAN EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Abstract**— This article explores the development of educational and cultural cooperation between China and Azerbaijan within the broader context of their political and economic relations. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1992, cooperation between the two countries has steadily grown, with education becoming one of the key areas of partnership. Particular attention is paid to the role of institutions such as Confucius Institutes in Azerbaijan and Azerbaijani language and culture centers in China, which support language learning, academic exchange, and intercultural understanding. Besides this it also discusses the increasing appeal of Chinese higher education for Azerbaijani students, driven by its affordability, quality, and the rising global standing of leading Chinese universities. In addition, it highlights the role of cultural policy and soft power in China's development approach, showing how the integration of cultural heritage into education helps strengthen its international presence. Furthermore, the study examines the impact of high-level political engagement, especially the role of Ilham Aliyev, in advancing educational cooperation, student mobility, and joint research initiatives. Special focus is given to Beijing Foreign Studies University, where Azerbaijani language programs demonstrate the growing closeness between the two societies [1]. Overall, the article shows that educational and cultural cooperation plays an important role in strengthening mutual understanding and provides a strong foundation for deeper and more sustainable diplomatic and economic relations between China and Azerbaijan.

**Keywords**— Azerbaijan; China; relations; education; university; soft power.

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### INTRODUCTION

China-Azerbaijan cooperation covers a wide range of spheres, such as political, economic, cultural,

and educational fields. These areas have shown steady and continuous development, largely due to the progressive policies pursued by the leadership of both countries. After the establishment of

diplomatic relations on 2 April 1992 and the opening of embassies in both countries, high-level visits between the two nations took place, helping to set the stage for a strong political dialogue which led to improvement in the educational field [10].

#### CHINA'S WORLDWIDE EDUCATION POLICY AND COOPERATION WITH AZERBAIJAN

A key component of educational cooperation between the two countries is the work of Confucius Institutes and the promotion of Chinese language education, alongside the activities of Azerbaijani language and culture centers, which have been expanding steadily in recent years. Azerbaijan hosts 2 Confucius Institutes: The first was established at Baku State University in 2011 and the second at Azerbaijani University of Languages in 2016. Both act as educational and cultural bridges between China and Azerbaijan. We can transparently observe both of these institutions enabling students, academic exchanges, language learning and greater insight into Chinese culture [5], [6]. Each year, these institutions not only demonstrate their effectiveness through the activities mentioned above, but also organize various language and culture competitions that attract Chinese enthusiasts, including school and university students, teachers, researchers, and other groups of Azerbaijani citizens. Recently China's popular universities have been considered as Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Peking University, Fudan University and so on [8]. The fact that these universities are ranked alongside the world's most prestigious institutions proves their competitiveness, which has positively influenced even schoolchildren from remote villages in Azerbaijan to show interest in studying in China, despite being in lower grades. Both parents and students, as well as researchers, increasingly choose China over European countries, the United States, or Canada for higher education. The main reasons for this preference are that education in China is affordable, safe, and of high quality, and scholarship opportunities are accessible. In addition, China's significant strides toward becoming a leading economic power among the world's major countries also strengthen confidence in the country's bright future.

This is another advancement in the scientific field that enhances educational cooperation not only between our countries but also contributes to global science. We can see this through many scientific research papers published in Chinese Scopus-indexed journals. Even school students' scientific research papers are published in order to be admitted and study at the most famous top Chinese universities in future.

One important part has to be indicated that China's acquisition progress in all fields is based on its citizens devoting their culture deeply. We can see it in their traditional cuisine, religion, architecture, sports, cloth, ceremonies, art, painting, calligraphy and so on. For example: China's calligraphy policy is very important. Even though it is included in school and university curricula, China actively fosters the global presence of calligraphy through exhibitions, training sessions, and research exchanges. Besides this policy China government provides support and funding through local and national agencies for those who are working on this heritage culture. China's cultural strategy includes a comprehensive plan to strengthen and promote traditional calligraphy as part of its linguistic and cultural heritage efforts, with key objectives to be achieved by 2030 [12]. China's education system incorporates the cultural heritage examples mentioned above into its curricula, with government support provided through funding and international promotion initiatives. These efforts aim to enhance China's soft power, which is a strategic priority for the country. While some hegemonic countries rely on hard power, China demonstrates a masterful approach by leveraging soft power, making the country culturally attractive to international audiences and enthusiasts of Chinese culture.

#### AZERBAIJAN'S WORLDWIDE EDUCATION POLICY AND COOPERATION WITH CHINA

National Leader Heydar Aliyev strongly promoted Azerbaijan's integration into the international education community and founded the strongest educational policy. His foreign education policy was a key element of a wider plan to modernize the nation and expand international cooperation.

His alignment with international standards, overseas education, international educational cooperation, language and cultural exchange policies are pursued by his honored successor Ilham Aliyev. From 2019 to 2028, the State Program funding and intergovernmental scholarship agreements Azerbaijani students abroad including China and other countries' famous universities demonstrate President Ilham Aliyev's strong education policy [11].

Another part of this policy is increasing "Azerbaijani language and culture centers" overseas. Besides this official online language platform "Ana dili -Azərbaycan məktəbi" (Native language - Azerbaijani school) which was supported by the government enhanced this process. This platform was established in 2023 and has since continued its online activities by teaching the Azerbaijani language and culture as a heritage language to Azerbaijani children abroad, including in China [9].

The first step in establishing "Azerbaijani culture and language center" direction was taken at Huzhou University near Shanghai, China. Huzhou University, a TOP-350 Chinese higher education institution with over 20,000 students, has strong academic ties with ADU in 2017. A dedicated space has been allocated at the university for the establishment of the 'Azerbaijani Language and Culture' Center through which many Chinese students have begun learning the Azerbaijani language and engaging with Azerbaijan's culture, history and literature as part of their academic activities [4].

During Azerbaijan's honored president, Ilham Aliyev's six official and working visits to China since 2005 he has shown a strong will and interest in promoting educational cooperation between the two countries. These initiatives have included promoting the exchange of students and academics, establishing Azerbaijani language programs at Chinese institutions such as Beijing Foreign Studies University, and supporting joint research projects in various areas. Guided by him, scholarships and academic partnerships have been expanded, enabling Chinese students to study Azerbaijani language, culture, and history, while Azerbaijani students have increasingly participated in education and culture programs in China. These efforts represent a broader strategy to enhance social interactions, enhance cultural

understanding, and strengthen durable academic ties as a foundation for deeper diplomatic and economic relations between Azerbaijan and China. Beijing Foreign Studies University offers Azerbaijani as a formal language program. Since admissions began in 2018, Beijing Foreign Studies University has offered the first and currently the only Azerbaijani language undergraduate major in China, and it is one of the few institutions globally, outside Azerbaijan, where students can study Azerbaijani at a full academic level [2]. Students in China at BFSU are pursuing studies in Azerbaijani language, culture, and associated fields. For instance, recent events have showcased Chinese students participating in Azerbaijani language programs [7]. In addition to its degree programs, BFSU provides online Azerbaijani lessons accessible to a larger population in China, reaching many students through nationally supported platforms [3]. These Chinese students speak Azerbaijani fluently and even introduce themselves using Azerbaijani. They show respect for our culture, just as we respect theirs. This demonstrates that culture serves as a key bridge connecting nations more closely within the frameworks of education, diplomacy, and economic policy.

#### BILATERAL EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND CHINA

Among the countries of the South Caucasus, the Republic of Azerbaijan stands out for its strong interest in steadily expanding educational ties with the People's Republic of China. The official institutions of both countries emphasize not only cooperation in education, but also the strengthening of bilateral relations in such fields as economics, culture, agriculture, industry, and food production, and these developments are widely communicated to the public through mass media.

As in other areas of bilateral relations, educational cooperation between China and Azerbaijan has advanced significantly through agreements signed by government representatives of the two countries. In the coming years, important measures are expected to further deepen cooperation in education, including the establishment of dual-degree programs and the expansion of language teaching initiatives. The Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of

Education, signed between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China in 2020, covers student exchange and internship programs. Under the terms of this agreement, the number of students enrolled at the bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels and funded by government scholarships from both countries may reach up to 100 participants in total [13].

The consistent development of educational cooperation led to the signing of the Joint Declaration on Strategic Partnership in July 2024, which specifically noted the steady progress of bilateral collaboration in education.

By 2025, leading Azerbaijani higher education institutions and research organizations including Baku State University, Khazar University, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Azerbaijan State Oil and Industry University, and Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences had established active partnerships with Chinese counterparts such as the Confucius Institute at Azerbaijan University of Languages, Shanghai University, the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Azerbaijan, Huawei, and Beijing Foreign Studies University. The participation of students, faculty members, and researchers in exchange programs and academic collaboration has contributed to the strong institutional standing of these universities and research centers. [13]

It is particularly noteworthy that more than thirty Azerbaijani educational and research institutions cooperate with Chinese universities and scientific organizations, and five of these Azerbaijani institutions are located outside Baku. This demonstrates the successful implementation of decentralization policies in education, as well as the effective use of soft power strategies by both countries. In total, 167 cooperation links have been established between Azerbaijani and Chinese institutions, involving 96 Chinese universities, 18 research institutes, 18 government agencies, 15 Chinese companies, 11 Confucius Institutes, and 10 other Chinese organizations. Approximately 57 percent of these partnerships are direct collaborations between universities [13], [19].

The Confucius Institutes operating at Baku State University and Azerbaijan University of Languages play an important role in promoting Chinese language, culture, and educational opportunities offered by the People's Republic of China. Beyond language instruction, they

contribute to shaping positive perceptions of China's governance model and institutions through lectures, seminars, and cultural events.

By organizing official and traditional Chinese celebrations and hosting academic programs, these institutes serve as significant instruments of China's soft power in Azerbaijan.

The visit of representatives from Hexi University to Sumgait State University on July 10, 2023, and discussions concerning the establishment of a new Confucius Institute, suggest that this influence is likely to expand further. In addition, Confucius Classrooms established at Azerbaijan University, Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Azerbaijan Tourism and Management University, and Khazar University offer Chinese language and culture courses, Business Chinese training, HSK examinations, translation services, educational exchange support, travel consultations for prospective visitors to China, and translation of scholarly works from Chinese into Azerbaijani [18], .

#### DEEPENING EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION WITH CHINESE COMPANIES

One of the Chinese companies that has made a substantial contribution to educational cooperation between Azerbaijan and China is Huawei Technologies. For the past decade, Azerbaijani students have benefited from Huawei's global talent development initiative, Seeds for the Future, which provides short-term training and exchange opportunities in China. Huawei has also established close partnerships with Azerbaijani universities, particularly the Baku Higher Oil School, through a series of memoranda and cooperation agreements [16], [17].

In addition to Huawei, institutions such as Azerbaijan State University of Economics and Azerbaijan University of Architecture and Construction have developed ties with Chinese companies including Modern China and China State Construction Engineering Corporation.

The role of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences in fostering educational and research cooperation with China deserves special emphasis. The Academy has signed multiple memoranda and agreements with Chinese institutions, most notably with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In 2017, the two sides jointly organized

a scientific conference on Azerbaijan–China economic cooperation, and in 2018 they co-authored and published a scholarly book. [13] Overall, the principal forms of cooperation currently developing between Azerbaijan and China in education include memoranda and inter-institutional agreements, conferences and seminars, joint research projects, the establishment of academic and cultural centers, dual-degree programs, summer camps and summer schools, and student and faculty exchange programs.

On December 8, 2023, Baku State University, the Language Education and Cooperation Center of China's Ministry of Education, and Anhui University signed a trilateral agreement to launch a joint bachelor's program in International Chinese Language Education. The main objectives of this initiative are to strengthen inter-university cooperation and to maximize the benefits of Anhui University's expertise in Chinese language and literature for both students and faculty [14].

Under the terms of the agreement, Azerbaijani students enrolled full-time in Chinese Language and Literature at Baku State University may complete the first two years of their four-year bachelor's degree in Baku. If they meet the exchange requirements, they can continue the final two years at Anhui University in China. Students who successfully complete their examinations and defend their graduation thesis receive diplomas from both universities. The Confucius Institute at Baku State University plays a coordinating role in implementing this dual-degree program. Working closely with the Faculty of Oriental Studies, the Institute provides Chinese language instruction through visiting teachers from China and regularly organizes Chinese Culture Days, free speaking clubs, and summer schools at Anhui University to enhance students' language proficiency.

In addition to its partnership with Anhui University, Baku State University has signed cooperation agreements with several Chinese institutions, including Beijing Foreign Studies University, Hefei University of Technology, Tongji University, and Tianshui Normal University. In 2025, forty-four Chinese students were enrolled at Baku State University [14].

The Azerbaijan University of Languages has also made a noteworthy contribution to the advancement of educational ties between Azerbaijan and China. In particular, the successful

activities of both the Confucius Institute and the China Center at the university have enabled the regular organization of high-level events attended by the university's leadership, as well as the Chinese ambassador to Azerbaijan and other official representatives. These events are aimed at strengthening bilateral cooperation in culture, politics, economics, education, and other fields.

A notable example was the event held at Azerbaijan University of Languages in April this year to mark the 34th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Azerbaijan and the International Chinese Language Day [20], [21]. Speaking at the event, Lu Mei, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to Azerbaijan, emphasized that under the strategic leadership of Xi Jinping and Ilham Aliyev, China–Azerbaijan relations have in recent years been elevated to the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership. She further noted that economic and trade cooperation between the two countries has continued to expand and that the friendship between their peoples has grown even stronger.

The ambassador's consistent appreciation of presentations delivered by faculty members and students at these events provides clear evidence of the strong mutual interest of both countries in deepening cooperation in the field of education.

A clear indication of the Azerbaijani government's commitment to expanding official educational dialogue with China was the meeting held at the beginning of the previous academic year between Azerbaijan's Minister of Science and Education, Emin Amrullayev, and China's Vice Minister of Education, Jiangfeng Du. During this meeting, the parties discussed both existing cooperation and future prospects for further development in the field of education [15].

## CONCLUSION

The evolution of educational and cultural cooperation between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the People's Republic of China demonstrates how academic exchange can become an important pillar of interstate relations. What began as a component of broader diplomatic engagement after the establishment of official relations in 1992 has developed into a multifaceted partnership that

includes language education, university collaboration, student and faculty mobility, joint research, dual-degree programs, and cooperation with major Chinese companies and research institutions.

The analysis shows that this cooperation is supported by several mutually reinforcing factors. On the Chinese side, the internationalization of higher education, the growing reputation of Chinese universities, and the use of cultural diplomacy through Confucius Institutes have significantly increased China's attractiveness to Azerbaijani students and academic institutions. On the Azerbaijani side, state policies aimed at expanding international educational opportunities, promoting the Azerbaijani language abroad, and strengthening academic diplomacy have created favorable conditions for long-term collaboration with China. The active engagement of political leaders and government institutions in both countries has provided the strategic direction necessary for transforming educational contacts into sustainable institutional partnerships.

The experience of universities such as Baku State University, Azerbaijan University of Languages, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Huzhou University, and Anhui University illustrates how educational cooperation is translated into practical outcomes. These include the establishment of Azerbaijani language and culture centers in China, the expansion of Chinese language instruction in Azerbaijan, the introduction of joint academic programs, and the strengthening of scholarly communication between researchers from both countries. At the same time, initiatives supported by Huawei Technologies and other Chinese organizations demonstrate that private-sector participation can further enrich academic collaboration by connecting education with technological innovation and workforce development.

Beyond its direct academic benefits, educational cooperation serves a broader strategic purpose. It enhances mutual understanding, promotes intercultural dialogue, and contributes to the formation of long-term professional and personal networks. In this sense, education and culture function as effective instruments of soft power, helping both countries deepen trust and strengthen their international presence without relying solely on political or economic mechanisms.

In summary, the China and Azerbaijan case confirms that educational and cultural collaboration has become one of the most dynamic and promising dimensions of bilateral relations. As both countries continue to expand scholarship opportunities, institutional partnerships, and joint research initiatives, this cooperation is likely to play an increasingly significant role in supporting durable diplomatic ties, economic interaction, and closer societal connections in the years ahead

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