

# SINO-GEORGIAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP COOPERATION IN EDUCATION



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Civic IDEA

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The views and opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or positions of any entities supporting activities of the Civic IDEA.

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## INTRODUCTION – STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Among the soft power tools employed by the People's Republic of China (PRC), manipulative actions within foreign states' academic and education sectors hold a prominent position. Western states, recognizing the risks associated with the Chinese Communist Party's foreign influence operations, including in the sector mentioned above, seek to implement effective containment policies by closing Confucius Institutes and developing specific guiding principles.

In Georgia, however, processes develop in the opposite direction. The state looks for ways to enhance relations with Chinese educational institutions (as well as others beyond the PRC). As of today, it should be mentioned that Sino-Georgian academic cooperation is quite diverse. It encompasses:

- Research opportunities,
- Exchange programs for students and academic staff,
- Scientific programs,
- Joint conferences and workshops,
- A wide range of language and cultural programs, joint degree initiatives at both university and academic levels, and more.

The establishment of a strategic partnership agreement on July 31, 2023, which included provisions for strengthening relations in education and science, raised expectations that the states' relationship would advance to a new, more meaningful phase.

In the statement of the strategic partnership, the following are outlined in [sections 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6](#):

*3.4. The two sides will enhance their cooperation in science and higher education. They will promote exchange of teachers and students, strengthen cooperation in science and commercialization of new technologies and implement joint projects.*

*3.5. The two sides support universities in both countries in carrying out practical cooperation such as joint training programs, and encourage universities to make full use of high-quality digital education resources and combine online and offline channels for cooperation. The two sides will promote student exchange and joint cultivation by making good use of government scholarships and other channels.*

*3.6. Both sides attach importance to language exchange and cooperation, encourage schools of both countries to carry out Chinese and Georgian language teaching, stand ready to strengthen exchanges and training of language teachers, and support the building of Confucius Institutes (Classrooms).*

## **STRENGTHENING TIES AFTER THE SIGNING OF THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

Following the announcement of the strategic partnership, concrete efforts have been made to promote Chinese language teaching in higher education programs and schools. For instance:

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| On<br>December 4,<br>2023  | following the agreement between Georgia's Ministry of Education, Science, and Youth and the Government of Shandong Province in China, <u>two additional scholarships</u> were allocated for Georgian students to study in China.  |
| On<br>December 11,<br>2023 | Vice Minister of Education Chen Jie met with Givi Mikanadze, Chairman of the Education and Science Committee of the Parliament of Georgia. During the <u>meeting</u> , the Vice Minister expressed China's willingness to enhance educational cooperation with Georgia in several areas, including expanding student exchanges, facilitating mutual recognition of degrees and diplomas, establishing China–Georgia university alliances, and promoting the teaching of the Georgian language in China and the Chinese language in Georgia. |

- On December 16, 2023 Georgia's Minister of Education, Giorgi Amilakhvari, attended the concluding event of the International Center for Education, where he presented awards to several countries' embassies, including that of the People's Republic of China. According to the official website of the Ministry of Education, the International Center for Education successfully conducts various academic programs within the framework of its partnership cooperation with the PRC.
- On April 11, 2024 Giorgi Amilakhvari met with the Chinese Ambassador to Georgia, Zhou Qian. During the meeting, the two sides, within the framework of the signed cooperation memorandum, discussed implementing joint educational projects at the general education level and developing educational resources to promote the teaching of the Chinese language.

The concrete measures taken following the approval of the PRC-Georgia strategic partnership demonstrate a readiness to make significant commitments to deepen educational cooperation between the two states. Consequently, this report aims to analyze Sino-Georgian educational relations in the post-Strategic Partnership period. Thus, within the scope of this research, we explored the dynamics of cooperation between Chinese and Georgian universities from 2022 to 2024.

Civic IDEA's following report also highlights the increasing Chinese influence in the Georgian academic landscape: the case of the Chinese rebranding of Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University. Additionally, the research examines the attitude of Georgian media toward Sino-Georgian relations.

## **COOPERATION BETWEEN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

As previously mentioned, the strategic partnership announcement includes a commitment to promoting "practical cooperation" between Chinese and Georgian universities. Accordingly, this report focuses not only on developments in the educational sector at the governmental level but also on the dynamics of cooperation between Georgian and Chinese higher education institutions.

It should be noted that while the research primarily focuses on the period following the Strategic Partnership announcement, however, in some cases, due to significance, the information presented extends beyond the designated research period.

**Within the research, the following universities were the focus of attention:**



Tbilisi State University



Georgian Technical University



Caucasus University



Ilia State University



Caucasus International University



The University of Georgia



International Black Sea University



Tbilisi State Medical University



The Agricultural University of Georgia



Akaki Tsereteli State University



Sokhumi State University



Samtskhe-Javakheti State University



Davit Aghmashenebeli University of Georgia



Grigol Robakidze University



Petre Shotadze Tbilisi Medical Academy



Tbilisi Humanitarian University



Alte University



Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani University



Kutaisi International University



Georgian National University

The results of our research indicate that, during this period, the above-mentioned **Georgian universities have not established any concrete or tangible new relations with Chinese universities. However, there have been numerous meetings, discussions, promises, and acts of mutual understanding.**

Before the announcement of the Strategic Partnership, cooperation between Georgian and Chinese universities had been steadily growing. As a result, there is no significant difference between the collaborative relations in 2023-2024 and previous years. However, specific trends have become more apparent:

- In 2023-24, opportunities for Georgian students to pursue bachelor's, master's, and doctoral programs at Chinese universities with full funding have expanded.
- Confucius Institutes and Classrooms operating in Georgia play an increasingly active role in promoting Chinese language and culture.
- In addition to student exchange programs, new forms of cooperation are emerging, including funded summer camps and initiatives to establish a double degree program.

## **FREE UNIVERSITY OF TBILISI**

One of the key actors in Sino-Georgian educational relations is the Free University of Tbilisi, which had been actively collaborating with Chinese higher education institutions even before the formal establishment of the strategic partnership between the two states. Notably, the first Confucius Institute in Georgia was founded at the Free University, highlighting its pivotal role in fostering academic and cultural ties. The evolving dynamics of these educational relations are exemplified in the close cooperation between the Free University and Chinese universities.

As noted in a previous report by Civic IDEA,<sup>1</sup> since its establishment in 2010, the Confucius Institute at the Free University has undertaken numerous initiatives to raise public awareness about the PRC and promote the Chinese language and culture. According to the Free University's strategic review and planning document,

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<sup>1</sup> More detailed information about the functioning of Confucius Institutes in Georgia can be found in Civic IDEA's report: "Chinese Leverage in Georgia's Academic, CSO and Media Sectors: Post-Covid Reality."



approximately 1100 students had participated in the Confucius Institute's Chinese language training program by then.<sup>2</sup> The interest in the program has continued to grow, and the current number of participants has significantly increased.

**With funding from the Ministry of Education of the PRC, specifically through the Center for Language Education and Cooperation**, several projects and events have been implemented at Tbilisi Free University. Notable among these initiatives are:

- **Development of a Chinese language learning application** utilizing voice recognition technology and aligned with Chinese language proficiency assessment standards (2021).
- **Creation of short video resources** on various aspects of Chinese culture as part of the Chinese Language International Education Project. This initiative, launched in 2022, aims to promote Chinese culture globally by employing innovative methods for those interested in learning the language.

Since May 2022, twelve former students of the Free University have pursued further studies at various universities in the PRC. Civic IDEA contacted several students who secured opportunities to study in Chinese higher education institutions through multiple programs. They shared their experiences and insights through written interviews (see Appendix #1 for details).

It is worth noting that the majority of respondents expressed a positive attitude toward pursuing education in China. However, during the interviews, concerns were raised regarding the desirability of studying social sciences in the PRC. One respondent specifically highlighted internet censorship as a significant drawback in the Chinese academic environment, noting that it hinders students' ability to conduct research effectively.

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<sup>2</sup> According to the 2019-2020 action plan report of the university, the Confucius Institute had 13 groups - 200 students; 2020-2021 years-10 groups, 83 students; 2021-2022 years-10 groups, 88 students (online).

## KUTAI SI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

As mentioned in our 2020 report, Kutaisi University established its relationship with the PRC that year by signing a memorandum with Xinjiang Medical University. This agreement included the establishment of a "Confucius Classroom" and opened the door to student exchange programs in China.

It is important to note that, according to the university's 2022 monitoring report, Kutaisi University won the Confucius Institutes project announced by the Ministry of Education of China. This achievement enables university entrants to study the Chinese language and culture for free.

Our previous research focused on the collaboration between Xinjiang University and Kutaisi University regarding establishing the Confucius Institute in 2021. This initiative was funded by the Chinese International Education Foundation, but updated information on the matter is lacking on both the university's website and in the media. Consequently, Civic IDEA contacted Kutaisi University to ask whether the Confucius Institute was functioning. In response, we learned that the Confucius Classroom has operated at Kutaisi University since 2021.



Notably, the [Facebook account](#) of Kutaisi University's Confucius Classroom displayed an authorization certificate indicating collaboration between Xinjiang Medical University and Kutaisi University under the Confucius Classroom programs. This authorization was valid for five years, from December 11, 2020, to December 10, 2025.

The Kutaisi Confucius Classroom is distinguished by its diverse range of activities. According to the [university's official website](#), the main functions of the Confucius Classroom encompass the following areas

- Chinese language studies for interested individuals;
- Organization of international educational exchange projects;
- Development of learning resources;
- Administration of certification exams for teachers and students;

- Coordination of international exchange programs and related cooperative activities;
- Promotion of cultural relations between Georgia and the PRC, among other initiatives.

In addition, according to the certificate of authorization mentioned above, the mission of Confucius Classroom includes:

- Promoting the spread of the Chinese language;
- Raising awareness of Chinese language and culture;
- Fostering cultural exchanges between China and Georgia;

Based on established practices, **Confucius Classrooms function as "branches" of Confucius Institutes, and their activities are carried out with the support of partner Confucius Institutes.** For example, on April 30, 2022, to mark the 30th anniversary of China-Georgia diplomatic relations, the Embassy of the PRC in Georgia organized a [competition](#) titled, "Let's Write a New Chapter of China-Georgia Friendship Together and Draw a Bright Future for Both Countries." The event was co-organized by the Confucius Institutes of Alti University and Free University, the Confucius Classroom of Kutaisi University, and the media company "4You.ge." The competition was open to anyone with a passion for calligraphy and painting, with the requirement that the submitted works [reflected the theme](#) of "China-Georgia friendship."

The Confucius Classroom at Kutaisi University fully carries out the activities typically associated with a Confucius Institute. For example:

- The [2022 monitoring report](#) reveals that the Confucius Classroom at Kutaisi University held negotiations with various [public](#) and private schools across Kutaisi to introduce Chinese language courses in secondary schools.
- The university's [2023 monitoring report](#) states that the rector and administrative staff of Kutaisi University, in a visit organized by the Confucius Classroom, traveled to the PRC to visit their partner institution, Xinjiang University.

Interestingly, Xinjiang Medical University has shown particular interest in the Confucius Classroom at Kutaisi University. For instance, during a [visit](#) by a delegation from Xinjiang Medical University in June 2024, the delegation members evaluated the Chinese language proficiency of the students at Kutaisi University.

The collaboration between Kutaisi University and Chinese higher education institutions extends far beyond the activities of the Confucius Classroom, encompassing a much broader and more diverse range of initiatives. Noteworthy is the [2023 China-Eurasia Expo](#), an international educational forum in Urumqi titled "Deepening

Educational Exchange and Building a Better Future." Organized by the Department of Education of Xinjiang Autonomous Region and the Chinese Ministry of Education, the event was attended by a delegation from Kutaisi University. During the forum, the university's rector, Gocha Tutberidze, delivered a presentation on the modern challenges of medical education in Georgia.

The university's rector, Gocha Tutberidze, spoke at another international conference in 2023, where he presented on the topic "Language Education and Mutual Learning Across Civilizations."



## CHINESE UNIVERSITIES' SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

**One of the primary tools employed by the PRC in the field of education is its exchange and government scholarship programs.** Reflecting this strategy, the 2023-2024 academic years were no exception, as Georgian universities maintained strong cooperation with the PRC's higher education institutions.

### TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY

Over the past two years, Tbilisi State University has introduced several scholarship competitions for its students:

- In 2023, a scholarship competition was announced for master's and doctoral students at Tbilisi State University. The winning applicants were awarded study

scholarships at the Beijing Institute of Technology for the 2023-2024 academic year as part of this competition.

- In May 2023, universities in China's Sichuan Province [announced](#) scholarship programs for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students.
- In 2024, the East China University of Political Science and Law [announced](#) admissions for summer and academic study programs.

## **ILIA STATE UNIVERSITY**

During the 2022-2024 academic semesters, Ilia State University, similarly to Tbilisi State University, consistently informed its students about scholarship opportunities from Chinese partner universities. According to information posted on the official website of Ilia State University:

- In 2022, the Silk Road School at Renmin University of China [announced](#) admissions for its fully funded Master's Program in "Contemporary Chinese Studies."
- In 2023, students at Ilia State University aged 18 to 45 [had the opportunity](#) to receive full funding from the Shandong Provincial Government.
- For the 2023-2024 academic year, Chinese government scholarships [were announced](#) for three English-language master's programs at the Beijing Institute of Technology: Mechanical Engineering, Computer Science and Technology, and International Organizations and Global Governance.
- For the 2023-2024 academic year, admissions [were announced](#) for one-year English-language master's programs at Chinese universities. This initiative was supported by the China Scholarship Council under the Youth of Excellence Scheme Scholarship.

## **INTERNATIONAL BLACK SEA UNIVERSITY**

Students at International Black Sea University, like those at other educational institutions in Georgia, have the opportunity to secure funding to pursue their studies in the PRC.

According to the university's official website, in May of 2023, the universities of Sichuan Province in China [announced](#) academic scholarship programs. These scholarships were available for Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral programs, including fields such as computer engineering, clinical medicine, tourism, and agriculture.

## JOINT EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to student exchange programs, educational cooperation with the PRC includes formats such as scientific conferences and dual degree programs. In this regard, several important events should be mentioned:

In October 2022, the International Black Sea University hosted the 17th International Silk Road Conference. The key speaker of the conference was Marcus Vinicius De Freitas, a visiting professor of International Law and International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing.



International Black Sea University participated in a project to develop a new double degree program in English entitled "Computer Science and Management." This program was created in cooperation with universities from various countries, including partners from the PRC.

Notably, during the research period, a new format of cooperation was identified: youth summer camps. In 2023, Sias University in China opened applications for its Global Youth Camp, which offered leadership study programs, industrial visits, cultural excursions (self-funded), and lectures on topics such as Chinese history, culture, economy, music, and more. For Caucasus University students, participation in the program, along with transportation within the PRC, was funded by Sias University.



## CHINESE REBRANDING OF THE GEORGIAN UNIVERSITY

The key novelty of the research is the Chinese rebranding of Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University. Since [June 14, 2023](#), Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University has been operating under the name of [the Georgian International University - GIU](#).



საქართველოს საერთაშორისო უნივერსიტეტი – GIU უკვე მრავალი წელია, იმ მდიდარი ტრადიციების გამგრძელებელია, რომელსაც, თავის დროზე, უმაღლესი სასწავლებლის დაარსებისას ჩაეყარა საფუძველი და დღემდე ამ პრინციპების ერთგული რჩება. უნივერსიტეტი მიზნად ისახავს, შექმნას ინოვაციური ცოდნის პლატფორმა საერთაშორისო საგანმანათლებლო სივრცეში, უზრუნველყოს პრაქტიკულ კვლევებზე დაფუძნებული მაღალი ხარისხის განათლება, სტუდენტებისა და პერსონალის საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების დიაპაზონის გაფართოება და დივერსიფიკაცია.

Since 2008, numerous changes have been made regarding the name, logo, and other related aspects of the educational institution, including its shares. It is worth emphasizing that in July 2020, the company, [Georgia International Education Investment](#) (r/c: 406274008), became one of the owners of the university with [38% of the shares](#). Soon, on July 7, 2020, the latter became the owner of the controlling shares of the educational institution ([90% of shares](#)). Eventually, the Georgia International Education Investment fully acquired the university and became its sole [owner](#).

[Georgia International Education Investment](#) is particularly interesting to us, as its [100% share owner](#) has been a citizen of the PRC, [Kuang Zengzhong](#). We need to acknowledge that the same person is associated with a large international educational holding - [China Foreign Education Group](#)<sup>3</sup> - which, [according to the official website of the GIU](#), became the university's founder in 2020. As stated on the Chinese International

<sup>3</sup> China Foreign Educational Group is an organization founded in Hong Kong in 1999. It has been carrying out various types of educational activities worldwide for 25 years. On their website we read: "The group adheres to the „World Begins Here“ school philosophy, implements the international development strategy of 'Export and Import', promotes Chinese education in the Belt and Road Initiative member states, and builds an international vocational education system aimed at fostering competitive students at the international level." For more information see: <https://bit.ly/3UIQjOA>

Education Group website, it is this Chinese educational agency that Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University [merged with](#)<sup>4</sup>.

The same holding founded [The Chinese Institute of International Education](#), which has

## Higher education: four undergraduate

Guangzhou Foreign-related Vocational University (in preparation), Hainan Foreign-related Chinese Vocational University (in preparation), Xinyang Foreign-related Vocational University (in preparation), Georgia Tbilisi University of Education ([merger and acquisition](#))



an office at the Georgian International University. It should also be noted that the director of Georgia International Education Investment LLC is [Eliso Elisashvili](#), who also used to hold various [leadership positions](#) both at the Georgian International University and at [Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University](#). According to social media, Ms. Elisashvili previously served as a senior executive at Hualing Free Industrial Zone. She studied at Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) and Xian Jiaotong University (西安交通大学). Eli Elisashvili is an influential voice in Georgian media, promoting the PRC and its educational programs. For instance, in her [interview](#) on the morning program of the Mtavari channel, she discusses **how cultural exchange serves as a means to strengthen relations, highlighting exchange programs and summer schools designed to introduce Georgian students to Chinese language, culture, gastronomy, and martial arts. She believes these initiatives aim to foster a deeper connection between the two nations, aligning Georgia with China's vision of progress and modernization, particularly in business, infrastructure, and transport.**

As mentioned earlier, according to the GIU official website, the [owner/investor](#) and the president of the board of directors of China International Education Group is a Chinese citizen **Kang Zheng** (the shortened version of Kuang Zengzhong). It should be noted that this is the same person who, according to the extract from the Register of



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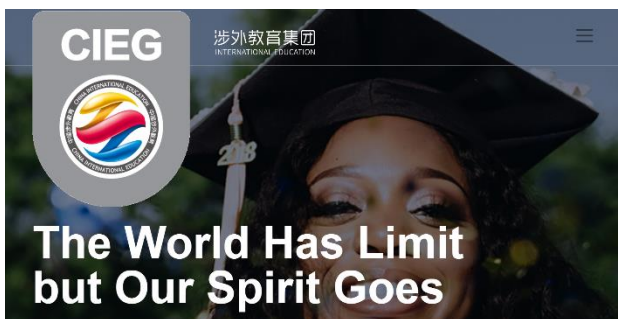
<sup>4</sup> It has to be specifically mentioned here that on July 6, 2020, the educational institution, then still known as Guram Tavartkiladze Teaching University, applied to the Public Registry and requested to keep confidential information such as the purchase price determined by the share acquisition agreement and its payment terms during the sale of shares. The university pointed out that the latter was a commercial secret and did not constitute public information - the argument was endorsed by the Public Register, and appropriate actions were taken. (See the decision of the National Agency of Public Registry # B20051194/3 (11/07/2020))



Entrepreneurs and Non-entrepreneurial (Non-commercial) Legal Entities, is indicated as the owner of Georgia International Education Investment LLC. According to his message, which is also available on the [website](#), it is with the support of the China International Education Group that GIU can take its place among the most advanced and sought-after universities internationally. In his message, he also emphasizes that students will be able to learn Asian languages, including Chinese, along with English, which will render them more competitive in the international market. The university's international partners are the main gateway to the global market. It should be noted that after Ukraine, it was with the Chinese authorities that the university signed international partnership agreements.

In particular, the [list of international partners](#) includes:

- Ancient Wines (China) <https://geocultureasia.org/>
- China International Education Group (China) <https://www.ciegr.com/>



- Guangzhou International Economics College (China) [https://www.gziec.org/?page\\_id=17213](https://www.gziec.org/?page_id=17213) (represents the affiliated college of China International Education Group)



- TANG International Education Group (China) <https://www.linkedin.com/company/tang-international-education-group/>
- Georgian Culture Asia Association (China) <https://geocultureasia.org/>

A memorandum of cooperation between GIU and the Georgian Culture Asia Association **was signed** in June 2022. As part of the agreement, university students are offered opportunities for internships or employment within the organization.

As for the association, it is **headquartered** in Hong Kong and **is registered** as a company there. According to information published by the association's official **Facebook account**, its primary **goal** is to foster relations between Hong Kong, Asia, and Georgia, emphasizing business ties.

The association **was established** in 2013 and **registered** as a "society" in 2014 in Georgia.

*Since 2015, the Georgian Culture Asia Association has been sharing information about Georgian culture. Interestingly, after a series of informative posts, the association **published** a sarcastic caricature in the same year, targeting Georgia's former defense minister and current chairwoman of Civic IDEA, Tinatin Khidasheli. Notably, this was the only caricature shared by the organization, standing out sharply from its usual content, which focuses on Georgia's rich cuisine, nature, wine, and other cultural aspects. As a result, the caricature of Tinatin Khidasheli is particularly eye-catching amidst the other cultural posts.*



格魯吉亞文化亞洲協會Georgian Culture Asia Association

May 28, 2015 · 🌐

COVER ME

Cover me! - Latest political cartoon of Georgia's newly appointed Defense Minister

A cartoon featuring recently appointed Defense Minister Tina Khidasheli has recently surfaced on social media. The idea the cartoon is based on is a recent photo of Tina Khidasheli visiting a military base while having her shoulders covered by an army-issue field coat.

<http://www.georgianjournal.ge/entertainment/30488-cover-...> See more

The Georgia International University also actively cooperates with Chinese agencies in Hong Kong. One of them is the leading Chinese state television channel [ViuTV](#), whose representatives visited GIU in December 2023 and filmed the university students together with Hong Kong students in a [TV series](#). In addition, during the same period, the chancellor of GIU, Eli Elisashvili, went to Hong Kong to participate in the fourth International World Chinese Language Conference. During the visit, she signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) with China's Belt and Road International Cooperation Development Working Committee. According to the memorandum, the parties will cooperate to establish the Belt and Road training and re-education center.



# SINO-GEORGIAN ACADEMIC COOPERATION FROM THE GEORGIAN MEDIA PERSPECTIVE

Information regarding the Sino-Georgian academic and educational relations and the activities carried out within the scope of these relations receives little attention in the Georgian media. In this regard, particularly noteworthy and relevant is the online platform Sinomedia, created by Georgian graduates of Chinese universities, the platform we reviewed in our previous media report “China’s “Wolf Warrior” Policy in the Media – the Case of Georgia,” and which is actively promoting Chinese state educational initiatives, competitions, academic programs, language courses and other similar activities in Georgia. Within the research period, the information circulated by Sinomedia refers to three different Georgian universities, two of which run the Confucius Institute and the third one - the Confucius Classroom. The information published by Sinomedia refers to the accomplishments of Georgian graduates in China, as well as international competitions and events held by Confucius Institutes in Georgia. For example, [According](#) to Sinomedia, on April 23, 2023, after completing their Master’s program at the [Beijing Institute of Technology](#), the Tbilisi State University graduates started working in the molecular biology field at the Department of Pharmacology of the Medical Faculty of the Southern University of Science and Technology of China (Southern University of Science and Technology, SUSTech, Shenzhen).

It is worth noting that, according to Uni-tracker, a website created by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, [SusTech](#) is classified as a medium risk due to its professors' involvement in defense research. Some of the university's partners include the Shenzhen Defence Science and Technology Industry Association and the Central Military Commission, among others.



## Beijing Institute of Technology

北京理工大学

**VERY HIGH**  
RISK CATEGORY

**TOP SECRET**  
SECURITY CREDENTIALS

10 MAJOR DEFENCE LABORATORIES  
✓ END-USER LISTS

34 DESIGNATED DEFENCE RESEARCH AREAS

Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT) is designated very high risk for its top-secret security credentials, high number of defence laboratories and defence research areas, and deep involvement in weapons research.



## Southern University of Science and Technology

南方科技大学

**MEDIUM**  
RISK CATEGORY

Southern University of Science and Technology (SUSTech) is designated medium risk for its involvement in defence research.



At the same time, they were actively engaged in research on the creation of RNA<sup>5</sup> immunization technologies at SUSTech.

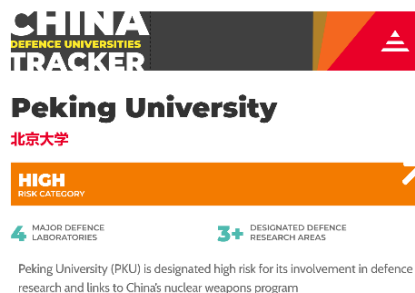
On April 27, 2023, the Confucius Institute organized the Chinese Language Day event at the Free University, where the director of the institute, Su Kuoying, gave a presentation on Chinese calligraphy.



Sinomedia offers articles on the fact that on June 9 and 10, 2023, an international competition - the Chinese Language Bridge - was held for schoolchildren by Confucius Institutes at Alte University and Free University, with the support of the Chinese Embassy in Georgia. The winners of the competition went on a study visit to China. Moreover, the final stage of the competition, which was held at Alte University, was attended by the Political Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Georgia, Mrs. Xiu Haicheng, as well as Embassy representative Xiu Chongxin, representative of the Teach and Learn with Georgia project of the Ministry of Education of Georgia, Professor Avtandil Kiknadze of the China Studies Center, Professor Liu Kuangwen, Honorary Chair of the Public Relations Department of the Georgian Silk Road Culture Center, Alta University Manager, Tamta Nikoladze, Dean of the School of International Relations, Ani Gvetadze, Director of the Confucius Institute, Chang Wengang and directors of the Kutaisi Confucius Class, Giorgi Datuashvili and Chu Zhienping.

<sup>5</sup> RNA - ribonucleic acid is a single-stranded nucleic acid that "carries out" code instructions in the DNA. Link: <https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/RNA-Ribonucleic-Acid>

Despite the scarcity of information on cooperation in education, Sinomedia obviously is not the only media that caught our attention. From the traditional media records, it is essential to remember the news week that preceded the signing of the Strategic Partnership. In particular, **Imedi** TV and other government channels dedicated long and extensive stories to the anticipated visit of Prime Minister Gharibashvili to China, the plans for the next visit, and finally, unsurprisingly, the channel intensely covered the visit itself. Among the crucial events that came under special attention from the Georgian media was the opening ceremony of Shota Rustaveli's bust at **Beijing University**, which was complemented by the statement of the Minister of Education of Georgia, Giorgi Amilakhvari. According to the statement,



*“Georgia is moving to the highest stage of relations with China, this is a strategic partnership, and it is within the framework of the Strategic Partnership that cooperation in the direction of education and science is also expanding.*

*According to Giorgi Amilakhvari, the rapprochement of Georgian and Chinese universities and financing exchange programs for students and professors will create even more opportunities for Georgian education and science.”*

Based on the statement, we can assume that in the next few years, China-Georgia academic relations will deepen, which automatically implies that the influence of the People's Republic of China in this field will grow against the backdrop of complete disregard by Georgian educational institutions of risk factors related to such kind of cooperation.

## CONCLUSION

It is essential to highlight that **cooperation among universities is highly welcomed and encouraged as long as it ensures Georgian students and researchers access high-quality education standards under full academic freedom.** The problem arises when, before initiating cooperation with Chinese companies, universities, and entities responsible for the Communist Party's education policy, there is no risk assessment document in the country. Moreover, research and findings from partner countries regarding the potential threats posed by such collaborations are entirely disregarded, among other concerns.

These two conditions—(1) high-quality education and (2) academic freedom—must serve as the foundation for educational cooperation, considering all potential risks and implementing appropriate resilience mechanisms.

During the research period, following the announcement of the China-Georgia Strategic Partnership, small yet critically essential steps were taken in the field of education. These developments provide a basis for believing that these relations will deepen and expand further in the future. The impact of the China-Georgia Strategic Partnership is evident in the educational sphere, with the increase in government initiatives, including scholarships and joint educational projects. In 2023-2024, both public and private universities provided their students with the opportunity to continue their studies in bachelor's, master's, or doctoral programs in China or to participate in educational and informative programs funded by China. As for practical academic collaboration between administrations, notable progress has been made through joint scientific conferences and meetings in various formats. Additionally, small but concrete steps have been taken to promote the Chinese language in both schools and universities in Georgia.

As for the media, despite the limited coverage of China-Georgia academic relations in traditional Georgian media, platforms like "Sinomedia" play a significant role in promoting the educational ties and related activities between the two countries.

However, Georgian educational institutions need to recognize the security risks associated with collaboration with Chinese universities, especially as the partnership with China continues to develop and its outcomes become more "tangible." With the advancement of Sino-Georgian academic relations, the role of Chinese entities is crucial in transforming Guram Tavartkiladze Tbilisi Teaching University into Georgia's International University, or "GIU." This rebranding, which began in June 2023, is a clear example of Chinese investment and influence in Georgia's higher education sector, as the controlling stake in the Georgian university is owned by Kuang Zengzhong, a Chinese citizen and chairman of the China Foreign Education Group. Moreover, the university's cooperation with various entities (such as agencies in Hong Kong), evidenced by partnership agreements, highlights the multifaceted nature of Sino-Georgian academic relations and underscores the growing role of the interested Chinese party in shaping Georgia's educational landscape.



## APPENDIX #1

1. Please indicate the name of the Georgian higher education institution where you are studying or have studied.

**Respondent N 1:** Free University of Tbilisi

**Respondent N 2:** Free University of Tbilisi

**Respondent N 3:** Free University of Tbilisi

**Respondent N 4:** Free University of Tbilisi

2. Please specify the faculty/the field of study.

**Respondent 1:** International Relations, with a concentration on the Far East.

**Respondent 2:** International Relations/Far East – Chinese Language.

**Respondent 3:** Far East: Chinese Language

**Respondent 4:** International Relations, Chinese branch.

### 3. Which program did you use to continue your studies in the PRC?

**Respondent 1:** With the scholarship of the Chinese government, which envisaged studying Chinese in the PRC for a year.

**Respondent 2:** I utilized the competition announced by the International Education Center to continue my studies in the People's Republic of China.

**Respondent 3:** With the Chinese government's scholarship.

**Respondent 4:** I obtained a scholarship from the Chinese government, which includes a one-year internship at a prestigious pedagogical university in China.

### 4. Was this program funded? (If so, by which institution?)

**Respondent 1:** Yes, it was fully funded—covering accommodation, tuition fees, and a monthly stipend for living expenses.

**Respondent 2:** The program was fully funded by the PRC's government.

**Respondent 3:** Yes, it was funded by the Chinese government.

**Respondent 4:** Yes. It was fully funded by the Chinese government.

## 5. What expectations did you have regarding the program mentioned above and education in the People's Republic of China?

**Respondent 1:** I had pretty high expectations and was very optimistic, as I had heard about the adventures of students who had previously participated in this program in China. Therefore, I anticipated that my own experience and education at a Chinese institution would be equally fruitful and exciting.

**Respondent 2:** First and foremost, my primary expectation was to get acquainted with a foreign culture and history, as well as to improve my language skills.

**Respondent 3:** I anticipated receiving a high-quality education in a high-tech environment, as well as interacting with demanding, educated lecturers and an international community on campus.

**Respondent 4:** In general, I met many successful students who had returned from the university, and they created positive expectations for me regarding the quality of education, the people, the local culture, and how I would be engaged with a polite and highly developed society, among other things.

## 6. Did the program meet your expectations?

**Respondent 1:** Yes, I would say it ultimately met and even exceeded my expectations. Although managing numerous documents and paperwork upon arrival was quite stressful, my time at the university in China, the education I received, the communication with lecturers and fellow students, the friendly environment, and the new adventures completely overshadowed the stress experienced by foreigners dealing with documentation in China. The program included accommodation on the university campus and a monthly stipend, so I was fortunate not to worry or struggle about housing. At the same time, my expectations regarding education were also fulfilled; I had very knowledgeable and friendly lecturers, and it was easy and accessible to communicate with them.

**Respondent 2:** Yes.

**Respondent 3:** Yes, entirely.

**Respondent 4:** Yes. Initially, I found it challenging to get settled, mainly because there was a significant amount of paperwork, and many procedures required more documentation and time for foreigners than for locals. This was the only barrier I struggled to overcome, and it was something I hadn't anticipated.

## 7. What do you think about the opportunity to continue education in China? What kind of positive and negative aspects do you see?

**Respondent 1:** I believe that if given the chance, I would go to China again to continue my education. The positive aspects include everything I experienced while living on the university campus: the education, the new environment and culture, various events organized throughout the university, and the opportunity to make numerous friends, among other things.

However, when I think about the negative aspects, I first remember that it can be challenging for a foreigner to handle even simple tasks like banking in China. Establishing communication in banks, immigration offices, hospitals, and so on can be difficult, as you need to submit numerous documents to various institutions, send paperwork to the police station, undergo many checks with doctors, and only then receive a residence permit. In the future, I would like to continue my studies in China, but the necessity of going through these processes again currently holds me back.

However, it is worth noting that the Chinese people tend to be very attentive and willing to help in such situations, which is a significant plus for me.

**Respondent 2:** Studying in China certainly has both positive and negative aspects. Notably, students have many exciting opportunities in this country, and there are various fields in which one can find and develop oneself. I believe that the decision to continue studying depends on the desired profession, and this is where I encounter the negative aspect. Education in mathematical sciences and technology in China is fruitful but not valid for social sciences. Therefore, continuing my studies in China is not a personal preference for me.

**Respondent 3:** The positive aspect is that China has several top-tier universities, especially in fields like engineering, technology, and business. Studying at places like Tsinghua University or Peking University gives you access to cutting-edge research and a competitive global education. Additionally, compared to studying in the United States or Europe, the costs of studying and living in China are generally lower (most scholarships cover the total cost of accommodation).

On the negative side, I see a significant barrier between Georgian and Chinese cultures, and it takes much longer to adapt to everything compared to, say, an average student adjusting to continental Europe or perhaps the U.S.

**Respondent 4:** I likely do not plan to continue my studies in China; however, I might think differently if my profession were related to a technical field.

**Positive Aspect:** The demanding academic environment and the different, rigorous culture of study make you more organized and disciplined, pushing you to become a strong, independent, and mature individual.

**Negative Aspect:** Navigating research and pedagogical activities is not easy, as there is a lot of disruptive censorship on the internet. Many other negative aspects in this regard are still related to bureaucracy.

8. As a result of your participation in the mentioned program, did you have any employment opportunities in China or outside of it, within agencies or institutions related to the People's Republic of China?

**Respondent N 1:** I don't think it's that straightforward. Although I was in China to study the Chinese language, simply having that experience won't necessarily provide me with employment opportunities in agencies or institutions related to the People's Republic of China. However, I believe participating in this program will positively affect my employment prospects if I decide to seek a job in China.

**Respondent N 2:** For now, I am still in China as part of this program, so I don't have a specific answer to this question.

**Respondent N 3:** No, job offers in the public sector are less common for international students. I myself worked in the service sector for a few months.

**Respondent N 4:** No, my Mandarin is not at a sufficiently professional level for that, and local connections are essential, which requires living and establishing oneself there for at least a few years.

9. Has studying at Chinese institutions influenced your personal civic or political worldview? If yes, please elaborate in one sentence.

**Respondent N 1:** I would say that studying at Chinese institutions has not influenced my personal civic or political worldview.

**Respondent N 2:** It is clear what the vision and mission of Chinese institutions are, which was already apparent before coming here; therefore, my time here has only reinforced my knowledge about existing state institutions.

**Respondent N 3:** Yes, studying Chinese institutions deepened my understanding of how quickly centralized governance can stimulate economic growth in a country. However, at the same time, it heightened my appreciation for democratic values such as transparency and freedom of speech.

**Respondent N 4:** It influenced my worldview only to the extent that it deepened my understanding of authoritarian, communist, and centralized governments and how they operate in practice. My perception of these systems was more limited before. However, my civil values have not changed.