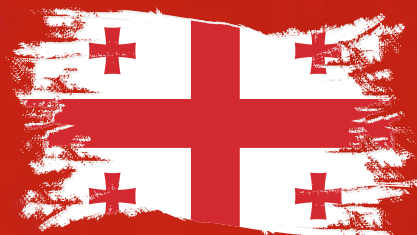


SECOND EDITION

# WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE POST COLD WAR WORLD?

*Chinese Leverage in  
Georgia's Academic,  
CSO and Media  
Sectors:  
Post-Covid Reality*



By Civic IDEA  
May, 2022

# Who is in Charge of the Post-Cold War World?

Chinese Leverage in Georgia's Academic,  
CSO and Media Sectors:  
Post-Covid Reality

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## INTRODUCTION

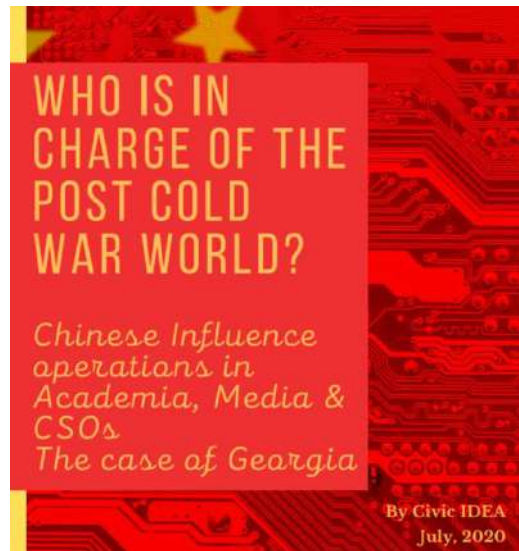
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Civic IDEA continues its research and analysis of Chinese influence operations in Georgia and the wider region of South Caucasus and Central Asia. In 2020, we have published our first report “Who is in charge of the post-cold war world? Chinese influence in Academia, Media & CSOs, The case of Georgia”.

The report is a comprehensive encounter of the Georgian case, but it is written with a comparative perspective of similar practices in other states as well.

The current paper is the second edition with similar interests. It reviews Georgia – Chinese cooperation in Academia, that is amongst various universities, academic programs, scholarships, etc. analyzing realities created by Covid Pandemic and its consequences.

Other than examining the Georgia case in various studies we publish, Civic IDEA also participated in a regional study initiated by the Slovak nongovernmental organization CEIAS. It is a research institute whose main area of focus is the analysis of relations between the countries of Central Europe and Eastern Europe with the countries of East Asia. Above mentioned study aimed at mapping and analyzing the scope of interactions between academic institutions of Central Europe and Eastern Europe with Chinese entities, which is implemented, in several countries of central and eastern Europe including Georgia. The study will be available in the summer of 2022 and launched by all partners in Slovakia.



## WHAT HAS CHANGED BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC?

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From the onset of the covid-19 pandemic, the world started confronting challenges in many different areas and spheres of life, that were not limited to just public health or hospital and medication issues. Many projects, meetings, initiatives, and people-to-people exchanges were either canceled or shifted online. One of the first victims of the pandemic after the health care sector was the system of Education in its entirety. Schools, colleges, and universities were first closed and then shifted to online studies. Travel restrictions changed the nature and status of basically all exchange programs being it degree programs, short-term studies, exchanges of scientists or scholars, or various other experience-sharing projects.

Academic programs initiated by Chinese universities or governments were not an exception to the rule. Our readers have learned from Civic IDEA's [2020 report](#), that year after year, Sino-Georgian educational programs and the bilateral partnerships were intensifying, thus escalating the growth of the Chinese influence in Georgia's academia. This tendency was mounting and a volume of concluded MoUs only created even larger promises and expectations. Though due to the pandemic, various long-term lockdowns, travel restrictions, social distancing, and various other regulations associated with it, many scholarships and study programs have either halted or moved to the virtual world. Nevertheless, it is to be outlined that irrespective of constraints Georgia continued dynamic cooperation with the Chinese educational institutions, as well as CSO and state entities delivering educational products, which led to specific progress in this field.

It is not only Civic IDEA who was left with this impression, this view is supported by [the Chinese Ambassador](#) to Georgia, Li Yan, who is actively cooperating with both Georgian government and parliament. Her meetings and conversations with members of the Georgian Government, usually cover not only political and economic but also educational issues. The result of such conversations is Beijing's generosity to Georgian students in providing state scholarships for learning not only by professional, but also Chinese language, history and culture, as well as financing Chinese language centers as its ideological weapon here in Georgia. This issue will be discussed separately and in more detail below. According to the Chinese [Ambassador's interview](#) with Forbes, "although the epidemic has had some impact on traffic between the two countries, we maintain good relations in politics, economics, culture, and other areas, and cooperation projects are being implemented smoothly." [In her other statement](#), which the Chinese Embassy published, the Ambassador specified that they are actively working with the Georgian side

to deepen relations in the fields of education and science. Even more interesting was the part of her statement about the cooperation in “television, news and publishing”.

**“ Today, cooperation between China and Georgia in the field of culture is actively underway. Literary and artistic troupes often make reciprocal visits. Collaboration in education, science, sports, film and television, news, publishing and other fields is constantly deepening.”**

In other words, notwithstanding the complications the pandemic has caused for both of our countries (Georgia and China), similar to the rest of the world, the PRC does not give up on Georgia and continues investing in soft power operations in various fields, including academia and general education.

The first part of the report looks at the recent developments related to the PRC’s activities in Georgia’s academic and media sectors. It serves as an update of our previous research and aims to cover the implemented and planned educational partnership projects between the two countries during the years of severe pandemic regulations. The second section summaries the most recent scandalous cases of Chinese malign influence in academia worldwide, its attempts of censorship, bribery, and espionage, the vulnerabilities of the western democracies, current trends in policy decision-making by our partner countries, as well as independent universities and the consequences of sino-western educational cooperation.

## CONFUCIUS INSTITUTES – IDEOLOGICAL WEAPON OF PRC IN GEORGIA

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As already stated in our previous report, the three **Confucius institutes**<sup>1</sup> working in Georgia, represent a vital pillar broad spectrum of educational benefits received from the People's Republic of China by Georgia and its educational sector. Confucius institutes are spread worldwide, usually disguising themselves as the Chinese culture and language centers, while in reality, carry Beijing’s political interests.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about the Chinese growing Academic and CSO influence in Georgia, the Confucius Institutes, and the Center for Georgia-Chinese Economic and Cultural Development, please visit: <https://civicidea.ge/en/2-report-on-georgian-chinese-affair/>

Following the analysis published by the [French Military School Strategic Research Institute](#), Confucius institutes are hidden behind the status of language and cultural centers while serving the Chinese Communist Party's broader foreign policy goals by damaging academic freedom and contributing to cyber espionage. However, whereas during the past several years, the CCP's effective ideological weapon has been exposed in Western societies, the Georgian high academic institutions embraced their expansion in Georgia. The facts support this statement. The pandemic indeed delayed some progress as planned in 2019. Still, regardless of difficulties, we are promised that the fourth Confucius Institute will soon be added to Georgia's existing three Confucius institutes. With the support of the Chinese International Education Foundation<sup>2</sup> and Xinjiang Medical University, the fourth Confucius center was scheduled for opening in 2020 at the [Kutaisi](#)



[University](#). The latter is also responsible for the Confucius classrooms at the University. The process was hal-[ted](#), but during [September'21](#) meeting between the parties, that was imprinted on the pictures there was an agreement on a quick resumption of the process.

Source: Official Facebook page of the Kutaisi University (UNIK), <https://bit.ly/3vcObuV>

The other three Confucius institutes are established at the [Free University of Tbilisi](#) (2010), [Tbilisi Open University](#) (2017), and [Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University](#) (functions with the unofficial name since 2017).

Other state and private universities actively integrate Confucius classrooms and scholarships. For example, since 2018, another Georgian university affiliated with the Orthodox Church of Georgia, the Saint Andrew the First-Called Georgian University (SANGU), in collaboration with the [Chinese Lanzhou University](#), has initiated a Confucius class and the Confucius scholarships for the students who pursue a bachelor of

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<sup>2</sup> "The Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF), a nominally independent organization registered with the Civil Affairs Ministry, supervised by MOE, and initiated by 27 Chinese universities, companies, and social organizations, will manage the CI brand and program." <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/its-time-for-a-new-policy-on-confucius-institutes/> Official Website, <https://www.cief.org.cn/sy>

international relations. Every year, students who graduate from the abovementioned faculty **have a chance to acquire scholarships** and continue their studies in Lanzhou, China. The SANGU students have kept winning the scholarship for the past several years; due to the pandemic, the program has shifted online.

We would not even mention the case, if not for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute's (ASPI) **University Tracker**<sup>3</sup> system, where Lanzhou University is carrying medium security risks due to its gradually growing engagement in defense research. Notably, it has signed a cooperation agreement with the Chinese defense companies and agencies and is involved in researching the following fields: **"nuclear science, electromagnetism, probes, chemistry, mechanics, materials science, stealth technology and information technology"**. One can assume that SANGU's close ties with this particular university must directly or indirectly entangle it into a research project, which might threaten the national security of the Georgian state. **As a non-profit (non-commercial) legal entity**, SANGU was founded on October 12, 2008, with the merits and prayers and blessings of his holiness Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Ilia II, and as mentioned earlier, is affiliated with the Georgian Orthodox Church. Despite the slight **annual decline in ratings**, the influence of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Georgia stays high till today. This is evidenced by the **IRI annual surveys**, according to which the church's rating is higher than 85%, meaning that more than 85% of respondents positively evaluate its work. Apparently, Beijing's desire to establish connections with this particular university is not accidental and can be considered as an attempt to connect with the Georgian Orthodox Church as the single most trusted and influential institution in the country.

Civic IDEA requested information from the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement (*legal entity of the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia*) about the legal status of the Confucius Institute and the Center for Georgian-Chinese Economic and Cultural Development, which is owned by the representatives of the controversial business

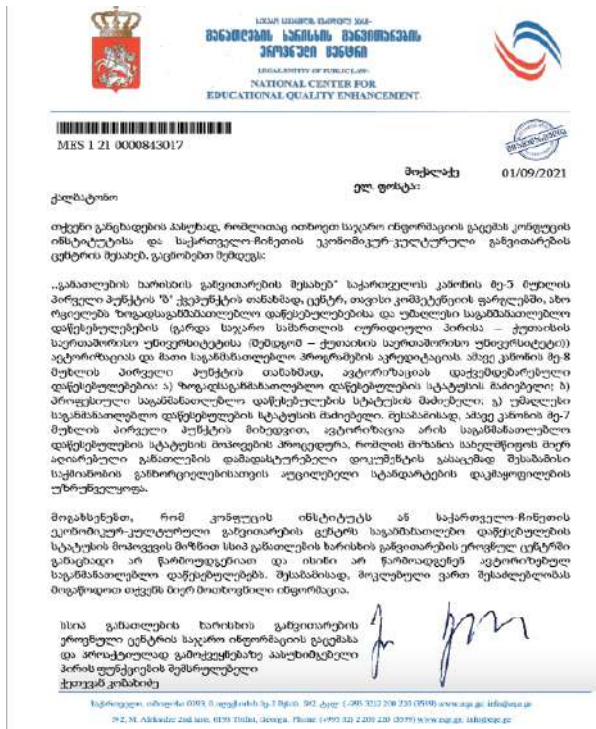
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<sup>3</sup> The China Defence Universities Tracker is a special database of Chinese institutions engaged in military or security-related science and technology research, developed by the **International Cyber Policy Centre** of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI). The Tracker was first launched in November 2019, along with a policy report. The Tracker was then updated in May 2021. This update – explained in detail here – includes the addition of 15 new civilian universities and updates to existing university entries.

The Tracker now includes entries on nearly 100 civilian universities, 50 People's Liberation Army institutions, China's nuclear weapons program, three Ministry of State Security institutions, four Ministry of Public Security universities, and 12 state-owned defence industry conglomerates.



elite<sup>4</sup> in Georgia. We also sent the Ministry of Education agency a detailed questionnaire about the training courses organized by the Chinese academic institutions and CSOs and requested information about the compliance of their programs and textbooks to the accreditation rules and procedures.



As we have learned from the reply, illustrated in the attached picture, to our request, the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement had neither authorized nor approved the curriculum of either organization we were asking for data about. This response means that their undertakings are not under the control or regulation of any Georgian state agency. Consequently, the Ministry of Education confirms that they cannot regulate whether the educational programs of Chinese centers conform to general academic standards usually required to carry out any relevant educational activities in a country.

According to the Georgian law, the competence of the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement extends to three types of educational institutions:

general —→ vocational —→ higher education.

If the institution does not belong to any of the abovementioned types, then it is not under the supervision of the center, meaning the institution is not subject to the obligation of authorization and accreditation. Hence, it can develop a curriculum and define teaching goals and methods independently of the Ministry of Education.

<sup>4</sup> The Center for Georgian-Chinese Economic and Cultural Development is the founder organization of the Georgia-China Friendship Association (GCFA) and is headed by Ivane Chkhartishvili, a highly controversial Georgian businessman, former Vice Prime Minister and closest ally of Georgia's shadow leader Mr. Ivanishvili. For more information, please visit "Mapping research I: Comparing foreign influence in Georgia":

<https://europeanvalues.cz/en/mapping-research-comparing-foreign-influence-in-georgia/>

Training centers, including Confucius or other language learning centers, are not overseen by the Ministry of Education. Any private person, as long as they have enough money and can pay for it, can set one and carry out educational activities within the universities, and even if it does not comply with the academic standards or format of a school, vocational college, or a university, they will not need permission/ license/ authorization or accreditation from the Ministry of Education.

**T**hat is why neither the Confucius Institute nor other Chinese language / culture courses are controlled by the Ministry of Education.

Furthermore, the Confucius Institute is not searched in the public registry database either, therefore, it is likely that it has no legal status at all, other than confirmed existence by the bilateral cooperation agreement between one and the university, thus functioning at the level of the university's structural units.

#### **მუხლი 13. კონფუციის ინსტიტუტი**

1. კონფუციის ინსტიტუტის ფუნქციას ჩინური ენისა და კულტურის გაცნობა ფართო საზოგადოებისათვის;
2. ინსტიტუტი ახორციელებს ჩინური ენის სხვადასხვა დონის შემსწავლელი პროგრამების მიწოდებას დაინტერესებული კონტიგენტისათვის;
3. ჩინური ენისა და კულტურის გავრცელების მიზნით გეგმავს და ორგანიზებას უწევს სხვადასხვა შემეცნებით ღონისძიებებს;
4. ორგანიზებას უწევს ჩინური დელეგაციების ვიზიტებს და შეხვედრებს;
5. ჩინური ენის შესწავლის მიზნით კოორდინირებას უწევს სტუდენტების შერჩევას ჩინეთში სასწავლებლად გაგზავნის მიზნით;
6. მჭიდროდ თანამშრომლობს ჩინეთის უნივერსიტეტებთან და საერთაშორისო ორგანიზაციებთან.

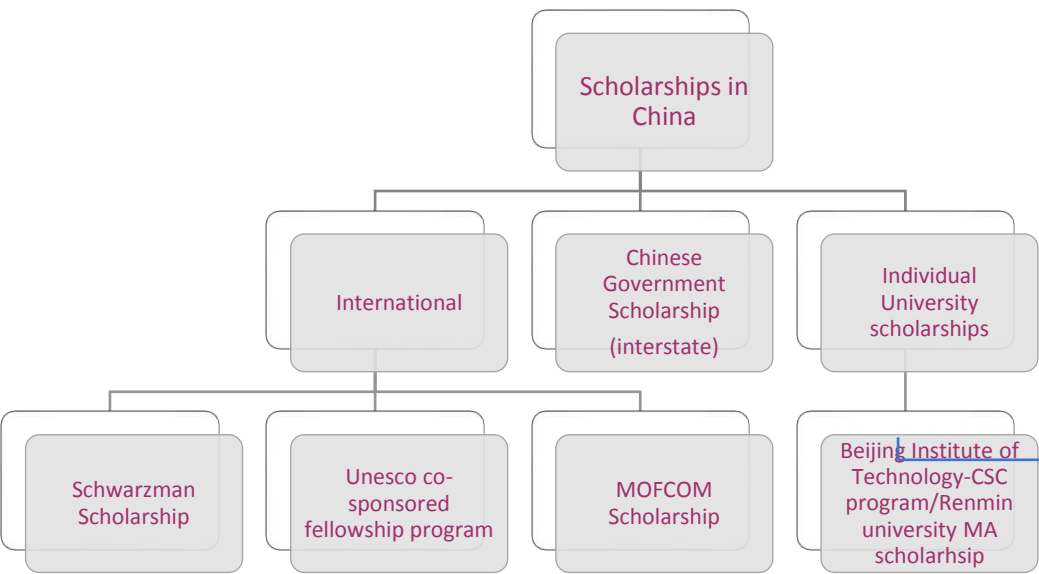
This statement is supported by the statute of the structural units of the Free University of Tbilisi, which is the only publicly available<sup>5</sup> document of this type. The statute, together with other university units, defines the presence of the Confucius Institute at Tbilisi FreeUni, as well as its goals and functions.

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<sup>5</sup> Source: <http://freeuni.edu.ge/sites/default/files/SEDF.pdf>



Chinese Communist Party often serve more long-term goals. As mentioned in our first report, some of the students who study in the PRC with these grants and get familiar with its ideology, vision, and narratives and are grateful may hold positions in the business or government sectors in the future and influence the statecraft in various ways.



Moreover, the Beijing Institute of Technology (BIT), which, as stated in our first report, has signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Georgian Technical University (GTU), has been very active during the last two years. It announced the **Chinese Government Scholarship (CSC) program** for the fall semester of the 2021/22 academic year, both for undergraduate and graduate students. Earlier in 2020, BIT initiated a similar scholarship program for the graduate students (Masters and Ph.D.) of **the Tbilisi State University**. The CSC scholarship **includes** tuition fees, on / off-campus accommodation, complex medical insurance, and a monthly stipend. To remind our audience, high-risk segment, according to ASPI’s UniTracker, due to its immense involvement in multiple defense research areas. More generally speaking, Georgian Technical University is the champion among its counterparts in the country by signing memorandums of understanding with the Chinese Universities. Other than BIT, GTU has **cooperation agreements** with three other universities not:

|   |                             |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <b>Guizhou University</b>                           | (Memorandum signed in 2017) |
| <b>Zhejiang Wanli University</b>                    | (Memorandum signed in 2016) |
| <b>Tianjin University of Science and Technology</b> | (Memorandum signed in 2016) |

In 2022, Renmin University is also particularly generous with scholarships for young Georgians. The latter carries a **low-security risk according to the ASPI website**. Within the framework of the memorandum of cooperation signed by them with **Ilia State University**, the Master of Contemporary Chinese Studies will be funded for Georgian students. The program is biyearly and combines 4 specializations: Chinese Politics, Economy, Law, and Culture.

In addition to interstate, government-sponsored scholarships, there are other sources through which China tries to attract Georgian students similar to the rest of the world. In 2021, within the frames of the internationally available **Schwarzman Scholarship**, Tsinghua University offered Georgian students from any local university a **one-year-long** Master's programs stipends in public administration, economics, business, and international sciences. Tsinghua University is famous for its contribution to defense research and involvement in cyber-attacks. The Australian organization ASPI has exposed the Tsinghua University to carry high-security risks due to its engagement in studies and initiatives that include artificial intelligence, missile weaponry, navigation technology, instrumental science, and nuclear weapons programs. Moreover, the given Chinese university is the owner of the scandalous Chinese company Nuctech<sup>6</sup>, alleged corruption and fraudulent activities worldwide, and blacklisted by the various **Western democratic institutions**. Tsinghua University is also involved in close partnership with the Kutaisi Akaki Tsereteli State University within the frames of the **Vanke School of Public Health**. Notably, in 2022, the notorious Chinese university offers Georgian students the PRC government funding for a one-year International Master Program of Public Health in China. The Chinese government scholarship program, in conjunction with the Chinese Ministry of Education, covers not only the cost of education but also the cost of international travel and living on campus.

UNESCO also co-sponsored an international fellowship program with the Chinese government, announced **on the website of Tbilisi State University**. The scholarship covers the study of students of both undergraduate and graduate levels at more than 300 Chinese universities in 34 provinces. "Twenty-five (25) of the 75 fellowships are specially intended for candidatures from the Teacher Training Institutions supported by **UNESCO-CFIT Project** in the 10 African countries." The other 50 stipends are distributed to other participating countries worldwide, including Eastern Europe, which covers its Georgian

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<sup>6</sup> For more information about Nuctech, its international scandals, and misconduct in Georgia, please see civic IDEA's 6<sup>th</sup> China report at: <https://civicidea.ge/en/civic-ideas-6th-china-watch-report-nuctech-company-ltd-in-georgia/>

share. To be noted, the Western and Central European states, as well as North America, do not participate in this scholarship.

The Ministry of Commerce of the PRC has initiated another international scholarship open for **Georgian students for the year 2022**. MOFCOM Scholarship provides **long-term financial support** for Master's and Ph.D. programs in China. For those students who do not speak Chinese, they offer language training courses for 1 or 2 years prior to degree studies. Consequently, a lack of knowledge of the Chinese language does not represent a barrier for the Chinese government for attracting international, including Georgian students. Yet, the Chinese always positively perceive that the representatives of different nations speak their language.

## Georgia's Chinese language diplomacy

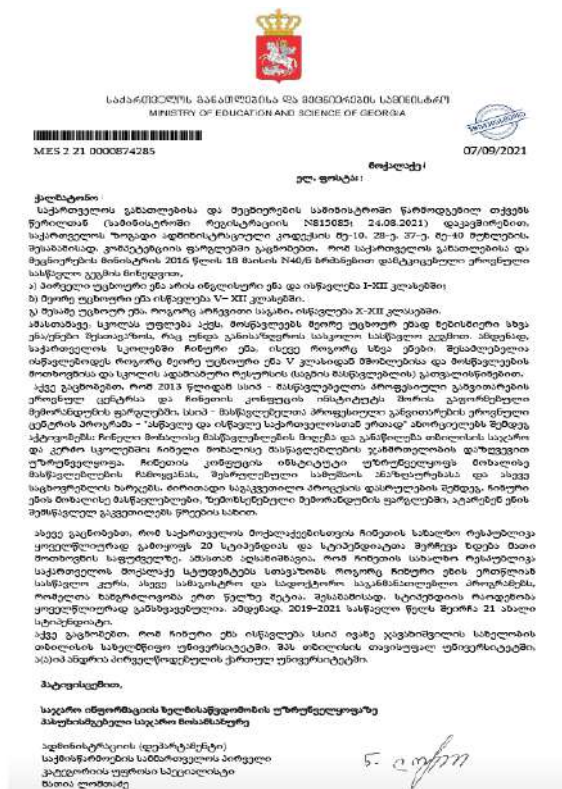
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The popularization of the Chinese language among Georgians has intensified significantly in recent years, both at the state and university levels. Georgian sinologists make a significant contribution to this story. One of the most distinguished in this regard is Ms. Marine Jibladze. She not only serves as a director and CEO of the Confucius Institute at the Free University of Tbilisi but, since 2018, has been appointed **Chinese language expert** at the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Georgia. In 2019, together with the State Language Department, she started working on the norms of transcription and transliteration of Chinese into Georgian. Her efforts of popularizing the Chinese language in Georgia did not go unnoticed, and in 2016, she received the Chinese Government Award for Outstanding Contribution. Her expertise goes beyond the Chinese language tuition and popularization. Ms. Jibladze also covers **international relations**, transmitting the CCP and Chinese Embassy narratives about the PRC - Georgia's cooperation and China being a **"friend in need"**, especially during the pandemic, and heavily condemning any criticism of PRC from calling it immoral and shameful.

While working at the Ministry of Education, Marine Jibladze developed the national curriculum for elementary and secondary education levels. Civic IDEA enquired from the Georgian ministry about the Chinese language guidance at Georgia's secondary schools. Surprisingly enough Ministry of Education responded to our request, referring to the National Curriculum approved by the Order N40 / N of the Minister of Education and Science on May 18, 2016:



- A) The first foreign language is English and is taught in grades I-XII;
- B) A second foreign language is taught in grades V-XII.
- C) The third foreign language, as an elective subject, is taught in X-XII grades.



Thus, the Chinese language, as well as other languages, can be taught as a second foreign language in Georgian schools. Apparently, the government agencies contribute to this process by allocating Chinese volunteer teachers together with the Confucius Institute. More precisely, the Ministry of Education emphasized that within the framework of the Memorandum signed between the LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development and the Confucius Institute of China, the program of the LEPL National Center for Teacher Professional Development - "Teach and Learn with Georgia" is carrying out the following activities:

- Admission and distribution of Chinese volunteer teachers in public and private schools of Tbilisi;
- Provision of health insurance for Chinese volunteer teachers.
- The Confucius Institute of China covers:
  - The recruitment procedures and the travel costs of volunteer teachers;
  - Remuneration for work done;
  - Accommodation costs of Chinese teachers.

The Ministry did not indicate the names of the particular secondary education institutions that have included Chinese as the second foreign language in their curriculum, so we could not check the activities at actual schools.

In 2021, requests were repeated for the introduction of the Chinese language in secondary schools. In June, the Chinese state-controlled media “China Daily Global” published an article by Mr. Jemal Putkaradze<sup>7</sup>, head of the Chinese Research Center, affiliated with the Georgian Technical University. After praising the Sino-Georgian partnership under the “Belt and Road Initiative”, he appealed to the Ministry of Education to start Chinese language lessons in schools. Thanks to his visit to Shanghai, the university signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in 2018. Under the memorandum, the Scientific Research Institute of China was established at GTU.

Other than GTU, since 2021, Chinese has been incorporated into the Master's program of Social Sciences at the Free University of Tbilisi. Students learn Chinese as extracurricular class beyond the core program curriculum. Georgia National University has also included Chinese as a part of its international relations program. Chinese is also taught at other universities which have hosted Confucius classes, Tbilisi State University, and SANGU.

## OTHER RESEARCH AND EDUCATION INITIATIVES

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There have not been many recent research projects jointly implemented by the Georgian and Chinese universities. Nevertheless, the case of Batumi Navigation Teaching University (BNTU), which has signed memorandums of understanding with the Georgian state entities, such as the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, is worth attention. In 2021, a research project called „Creation of Practical Guide in Applied Psychology for Seafarers“, prepared at the Batumi Navigation Teaching University won



the competition of research projects during the General Assembly (AGA21) of the International Association of Maritime Universities (IAMU). BNTU will implement the abovementioned project in partnership with international partners, such as Dalian Maritime University in China and the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia. As indicated on the official FB page of the BNTU, the aim of the project is:

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<sup>7</sup> Jemal Putkaradze serves as a professor in the Faculty of Engineering Economics, Media Technologies, and Social Sciences at the Georgian Technical University.



“ To conduct a survey of as many seafarers of different nationalities as possible, using targeted questionnaires, to summarize the needs identified by the questionnaire analysis, through partner institutions and maritime education, field psychology, and maritime specialists; In the second, final phase of the research, based on them, a training course for psychological training of seafarers will be developed, which will be aimed at improving the psychological stability of maritime industry representatives and in navigation, independently, to develop knowledge and practical skills for maintaining sustainability and self-control. The ultimate goal of the project is to publish a collection of comprehensive lectures and/or a textbook relevant to the training course.”

The project's outcome is particularly troubling because, according to the Australian UniTracker, the Chinese Dalian Maritime University carries security risks due to its cooperation with the Chinese state institutions such as the Ministries of Transport and Education, defense agency SASTIND, the Chinese Oceanic Administration, local municipal governments and the Chinese Military Commission. It is engaged in the programs of the abovementioned government structures and conducts research in the following fields: navigation, maritime transportation, ship intelligence, energy-saving technology, communication and information systems, etc. Therefore, Batumi Navigation Teaching University may inadvertently participate in research that may serve the purposes of the Chinese Communist Party and be later used by them.

Dalian Maritime University is not the only Chinese academic entity BNTU cooperates with. Since September 2019, it has become a member of the International Maritime Lecturers Association (IMLA). Since then, it has actively participated in various initiatives, training courses, and conferences. The organization has close cooperation with the Chinese government. For instance, according to IMLA's 2012 newsletter, the latter planned to establish its office in Shanghai using the local municipal government's funds. Moreover, its current president, Jin Yongxing, is the chair of the Shanghai Maritime University Council. Shanghai Maritime University is a state university established by the Chinese Ministry of Communications in 1959, currently involving 16 ministerial and provincial research institutions and labs. An investigation has been launched against its professors, postgraduates, and alumni who now lecture in different universities in the PRC and are involved in various research initiatives. More precisely, they were accused of plagiarism concerning security, information engineering, and satellite broadcasting systems.

As we can see, the pandemic did not hinder the development of relations between Sino-Georgian universities. Moreover, based on current trends, we may witness the further expansion of these relationships. Also noteworthy are their joint research and other academic initiatives, which may pose security risks and thus, threaten Georgia's national security.

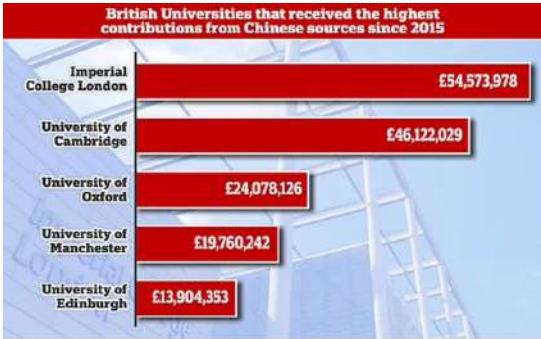
## CCP LEVERAGES FOREIGN ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

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Nowadays, not only Georgia but even world democracies keep experiencing various challenges related to the hybrid interference of the Chinese Communist Party in their academic sectors. Many high educational institutions worldwide fail to address the threats to their intellectual independence by establishing close ties with the CCP-controlled entities, be it a university or a private / state company, providing them with a solid amount of funding or other types of resources. This occasion leads to longstanding outcomes, such as bribes to professors, the spread of the Chinese vision on **sensitive topics** related to human rights, **“visa bans on scholars working on China or surveillance and self-censorship on their campuses”**. Moreover, according to **the French Military School Strategic Research Institute**, knowledge, and technology acquired through such global university partnerships can be used by Beijing for its foreign policy means.

Our report, as well as the latest examples indicated below, serve as a warning for those colleges and universities not yet affected by similar practices.

As recently revealed by the China Research Group (CRG)<sup>8</sup>, Huawei and several other Chinese state-owned companies that carry high-security risks have granted £40 million worth of funding to the **high-ranked UK universities** such as Lancaster University, Imperial College London,



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<sup>8</sup> „The China Research Group” was set up by a group of Conservative MPs in the UK to promote debate and fresh thinking about how Britain should respond to the rise of China. The group looks to consider the longer term challenges and opportunities associated with the rise of China and its industrial, technological and diplomatic policies.”  
<https://chinaresearchgroup.org/about>

Bristol, Exeter, Heriot-Watt, Southampton, York universities and others. Some of the listed refused to disclose the relevant information about the funding provisions. In contrast, others were more open about the issue, steering the investigation to enormous financial aid derived from the CCP. The money allocated by the CCP-controlled entities usually serves the research on semiconductors, computing, and big data machine learning. The strategically important information acquired from these sensitive subjects can be later used against the means of the academic institutions benefiting the broader foreign policy interests of the PRC government and the People's Liberation Army. Moreover, several British MPs cast doubt on the academic freedom of UK universities. The Chief of the CRG, Tom Tugendhat, also highlighted: *"Chasing the money around British Universities is revealing of connections and ties that will be seen by some as compromising academic independence"*.

The particular case of Cambridge University being under scrutiny for actively engaging with the CCP and its puppet units demonstrates the wide range of financial and other resources China uses to pressure and jeopardize foreign academia. Chinese company *Envision* has financed the reconstruction of the new building for the Cambridge Institute for Sustainability Leadership; another Chinese company *Tencent* allocated funds for Cambridge's Department of Engineering to research futuristic quantum computers. The Cambridge-Nanjing Centre of Technology and Innovation, created with the millions of pounds granted by the CCP, will work on the development of the "smart city" systems carrying strategic importance for the Chinese government; two centers created within Cambridge, China Centre, and Dialogue Centre *"initially embarked on programmes of China-friendly events that largely steered clear of topics such as Xin-jiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan and human rights in general"*. Notably, Cambridge's China Centre of Jesus College and Cambridge China Development Trust Charity have been particularly opinionated about these sensitive topics. Both centers are directed by *professor Peter Nolan*, who has been an advisor to the CCP leader and former PM Wen Jiabao. Also, Mr. Nolan has organized and participated in various workshops together with the CCP-owned corporations. Knowing his professional background clarifies why he disparaged students who blamed Beijing for ethnic cleansing in Xinjiang.

The Cambridge university's dependency on the CCP weakens its reputation as one of the cradles of British liberal education.

Overall, according to the investigation conducted by *The Times*, over the past several years, about 1,000 British / Chinese academic partnerships have been authorized. The most significant and transnationally popular universities, Oxford and Cambridge, have

received a subsidy worth £240 million from Chinese sources. Most of those sources are affiliated with the Chinese military. Hence, the funding has been allocated for the research as well.

Recently, Germany has also raised alarms about the growing Chinese influence negatively affecting the academic freedom of German educational institutions. Two German journalists were withdrawn from giving a speech at the Confucius Institute in Germany due to their publication concerning the CCP Secretary General Xi Jinping, who, according to the Chinese Consul in Germany, is “untouchable and unmentionable”. The blacklisting of Western journalists, scholars, and experts by the CCP is not a new phenomenon, and the previous German government and university administrations usually failed to address the issue. However, there is a hope that the new authorities might encourage and strengthen more independent China research.



One of the leading universities in the Netherlands was embroiled in a scandal related to Chinese funding. Based on the investigation conducted by the local media outlet NOS, from 2018 to 2020, a research center called “Cross-Cultural Human Rights Center” (CCHRC), affiliated with the Free University (Vrije Universiteit - VU) in Amsterdam, has been receiving hundreds of thousands of euros from the Southwest University of Political Science and Law situated in Chongqing, China. In return, VU had to portray the Chinese alternative views of human rights. Indeed, during three years of the partnership, professors working for the center and also linked to other Dutch Universities (e.g., Tom Zwart - the director of the center, Professor of Human Rights at the Utrecht University) kept praising China’s human rights policy. Moreover, the center ran a scientific journal and conferences, where, according to the cooperation agreement, it had to develop “a global view of human rights” with a particular focus on how non-western states, like China, view it.



This occasion is especially outrageous, as regardless of overall knowledge of the human rights situation of the Uyghur population in the Xinjiang region, CCHRC members have been actively spreading Chinese propaganda on their social media platforms, claiming that there are **no labor camps for Uyghurs** in China, and these stories are labeled as “rumors”. After the public leak of the information, the Dutch University **cut the subsidy** and returned the money to the Chinese academic institution.

This event was followed by a response from the **Dutch political parties in the parliament**. The lawmakers urged greater attention to this issue. Furthermore, Dutch Education Minister called on local universities to find a way to maintain academic values and independence. We will see the outcomes of these appeals and whether more Dutch universities will give up CCP subsidies in the upcoming years.

In Hungary, China is exploiting academia on a totally different level. In other words, it is not limited to Confucius institutes or research funding. One can label the policy used in Hungary as China’s academic “debt trap”. The Orban government has officially signed an agreement with the **Chinese Fudan University to build its local campus in Budapest**, covering the fields of economics, social studies, medicine, and engineering. There is no doubt that after its completion in 2024, the Hungarian branch will pursue the ideology and the alternative views derived from its Chinese mother institution situated in Shanghai. Following the official documents leaked by local investigative media “Direkt36” in 2021, the Orban government is planning to take massive **debt worth €1.5 billion** (US\$1.8 billion) from China to construct and equip the university. Even more dubious is that the construction is granted to the CCP-controlled company “China State Construction Engineering Corporation” without proper bidding procedures and in violation of the EU regulations. This occasion stirred massive protests in Budapest. Thousands of people marched in the streets, complaining about the lack of transparency and academic freedom. They claimed that the project **"will undercut the country's own higher education and increase the influence of China's Communist authorities."**



/Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-57372653>

Despite the demonstrations, the Hungarian government stays loyal to its cooperation with China and will not back down from building the university. As stated in the article published by [Carnegie](#), “Hungary has become a leading voice within the EU for closer relations with Beijing, having also opposed joint EU positions on several occasions, particularly when it concerned human rights issues”.

Beijing is also trying to strengthen its position in the Balkan academic space. Their efforts are mainly directed toward Serbia. Together with two official Confucius institutes there, three Serbian Universities: the University of Nis, the University of Novi Sad, and the University of Belgrade, have signed partnership agreements with Jiao Tong University in Shanghai to strengthen educational ties. According to the ASPI website Unitracker, Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) is considered a university with [high-security risks](#). It is directed by MOE and defense industry agency SASTIND and has three defense labs actively cooperating with China’s People’s Liberation Army. The cooperation agreements with the Chinese university involve various fields and directions, starting from the exchange of scholarships for Students to the distribution of Chinese financial aid.

The cooperation of the Serbian academia with the Chinese entities is not limited only to the Universities. Chinese company Dahua technology, which focuses on video-surveillance equipment, [has signed a cooperation agreement](#) with the local university in Kragujevac, Serbia. Another Chinese company Linglong has initiated a scholarship program for Serbian Students. Additionally, Beijing is financing the [construction of a \\$55 million worth Chinese Cultural Centre](#) in Belgrade. Therefore, PRC effectively boosts its ties with the Serbian academic and cultural institutions contributing to the dispersal of its propagandistic narratives on global affairs.

Not only are European states vulnerable to Chinese academic censorship, but similar cases have also been reported in the United States. The most recent example is George Washington University. The [art posters of Badiucao](#), a Chinese artist living in Australia and criticizing CCP with his works, were distributed all over the university campus. The posters displayed human rights abuses of Uyghurs, Tibetans, and Hong Kongers, as well as Beijing’s mismanagement of the pandemic. The university president Mark Wrighton decided to remove the posters calling them “personally offensive”, [“provoking racial hatred and ethnic conflicts”](#). His decision was triggered by GWU Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA), which openly expressed discontent regarding the artworks, demanding the president find and punish their distributors severely. Later Wrighton





巴丢草 Badiucao  
@badiucao

1. In response to CSSA, GeorgeWashington Uni  
@GWtweets president @PresWrightonGW claims he is  
“personally offended” by my art criticising China’s  
rights abuse like Uyghur genocide & oppression in Tibet  
& HongKong.

I demand him an explanation why exposing CCP’s  
abuse offends him.



6:00 AM · Feb 7, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

751 Retweets 227 Quote Tweets 2,066 Likes

regretted his decision claiming that no group or organization of students has the right to limit others’ freedom of expression.

Chinese Students and Scholars Associations (CSSA) have direct links with the diplomatic missions of the Chinese Communist Party and pursue their policies abroad. These organizations have also instilled harmful practices in Canada and Australia. For instance, in 2019, Student’s Union (MSU) at the McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, objected to the CSSA’s official status due to its ties with the Chinese government. This occasion

was triggered by an unpleasant incident occurring at McMaster when ethnic Uyghur activist Rukiye Turdush was disrupted during her speech by the students, who recorded and screamed and were instructed to act accordingly by the CCP. The Chinese student association has also engaged in campus censorship and espionage at the Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra. According to a joint Four Corners-Background Briefing investigation, CSSA in Australia is actively involved with the Embassy of the PRC, which coordinates its policies and activities. Alex Joske, an analyst from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, also highlighted that CCP-controlled entities, such as CSSA, are too welcomed by the Australian academic institutions, expanding their leverage on them. Despite all the alarms raised, such incidents are prevalent and continued in 2021 as well, e.g. Jane Golley, one of the professors at ANU, has been embroiled in scandal due to citing an anonymous document, according to which China’s mistreatment of 1 million Uyghurs is an exaggerated statement.

As seen from the above cases, the issue of Uyghurs is especially acute for China. Consequently, the latter tries to cover the human rights abuses and spread misinformation both in the political arena and academia.

Already in 2020, Sweden has introduced academic resilience toward China. It was the first in Europe to make the initial steps to fight against the Chinese malign influence in

Academia. It was also when the Swedish government decided to close all four Confucius institutes to avoid the security risks and the dispersal of the Chinese propagandist notions and conspiracies about the human rights issues among the local university students. One of the triggers of the Swedish severe politics against Chinese entities was the story related to the detention of the Chinese-born **"Swedish (by nationality) bookseller Gui Minhai for selling critical books about Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping."**

In November 2021, Swedish National China Centre published a study of "Swedish experiences of research collaboration with China: Challenges and the way forward", overviewing the main challenges Swedish academia faces in terms of the partnership with the Chinese institutions. According to the study, **the main problems of the Sino-Swedish research relations** go as follows:

- **Infringements of academic freedom,**
- **failure to live up to ethical standards in research,**
- **political influencing efforts,**
- **Lack of reciprocity and transparency,**
- **Undesirable knowledge transfers,**
- **Dual-use or unintended use of findings and espionage.**

As mentioned, Sweden was the first country in Europe to set an example of effectively deterring growing Chinese influence in the academic sector. Only after two years, there are more voices in Europe establishing very concrete policies targeting Chinese malign activities in academia.

The cases mentioned above demonstrate that, like other essential domains, academia can be exploited by foreign actors like the PRC. Both developing states and developed democracies can be equally vulnerable to Beijing's academic soft power. Unfortunately, we believe that the number of such scandals will only increase in the upcoming years as there is more to observe than meets the eye. Therefore, colleges and universities worldwide should be aware of the risks coming from the growing Chinese influence. Before agreeing on cooperation, they should acknowledge that the financial or other types of assistance directly or indirectly provided by the CCP is not free of charge and often contains certain obligations and censorship.



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SECOND EDITION

- What has changed because of the Pandemic?
- Confucius Institutes - ideological weapon of PRC in Georgia
- Scholarships as a part of the PRC's soft power play
- Georgia's Chinese language diplomacy
- Other research and education initiatives
- CCP Leverages Foreign Academic Institutions

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