The role of social and cultural interaction between Russian and Chinese students in changing the educational space of the Russian university

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Abstract. Students as a special social group can be considered as a guide of interaction between the partner countries of Russia and China as representatives of different cultures and different mentalities. Interaction between Russian and Chinese universities in the scientific and educational sphere has specific features and reflects the general mechanisms of functioning in social and cultural environment. The socio-cultural context of such interaction is the life activity of megalopolis, regional features and it is related to the socio-cultural traditions of people relationship. The general purpose of the study was to identify changes in interaction between Russian and Chinese students studying in a Russian University. The study conducted in Russian and Chinese Universities. The research methodology combined both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The primary data was collected using questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Three hundred and ninety respondents – Russian students and five hundred respondents – Chinese students, were questioned on the basis of quota sampling. Depths interviews were conducted with 20 experts. The study has revealed some actual issues and tendencies of social interaction in the educational sphere. It has a temporal character and it is developed in a single educational environment of universities-partners of Russia and China. The study has identified the structure of social interaction, consisting of five levels: 1. At the level of connectivity, social relations between social and ethnic groups (in this case, Russian and Chinese students) are established on the basis of their values. 2. At the level of translation, understanding of the values of another (different) culture through the interpretation of cultural codes (cultural signs) takes place. 3. At the level of transcendence, transition from one's cultural system to another, the development of positive experience and knowledge of another cultural system take place. 4. At the level of adaptation, an interiorization, application in behaviour and activity of values of other cultural system take place. 5. At the level of intercultural dialogue, an organization of effective and fruitful cooperation between social and ethnic groups and their representatives based on an understanding of the universal values takes place. The five levels of social interaction identified by researches in the joint educational environment of Russian and Chinese universities allow not only to find out the content components of the structure of social and cultural interaction, but also to consider its dynamics and development. Our research has identified a set of factors that affect the functioning of the interaction between Russian and Chinese students structure: geopolitical situation, cost and quality of education, adaptation of training courses for foreigners, comfort of the educational environment of University, the complexity of learning of the host country language, the prestige of education. This model of interaction between social and ethnic groups of Russian and Chinese students being representatives of partner universities is confirmed by the real practice of scientific and educational cooperation between Russian and Chinese universities.
Joint forms of University work have been successfully tested and activities that have become events of intercultural dialogue have been organized.

1. Introduction
The socio-cultural space of a modern university is largely conditioned by the peculiarities of the interaction of students, as well as the specifics of the global processes of globalization and internationalization of education. The problem of interaction between Russian and Chinese students in a Russian university as one of the problems of the research and understanding the process of socio-cultural interaction between Russia and China is examined and analyzed through the full range of regulatory functions of culture: socialization, communication, adaptation, education. Education is an important link between various areas of human culture: scientific, industrial, technological, leisure, etc. It ensures their interpenetration, the emergence of new forms of culture and changes in the infrastructure of social space.

Objective of the research is to identify the specifics and problems of interaction between Russian and Chinese students in the space of a Russian university, affecting its changes and transformation.

Tasks set within the study:
1. To identify the structure of socio-cultural interaction between Russian and Chinese students in the space of a Russian university.
2. To identify the factors which influence the process of interaction between Chinese students in the changing socio-cultural university environment.
3. To identify similarities and differences in the value orientation between Russian and Chinese students.
4. To study their interaction as a dynamic process that influences the change in the space of the university and its constituent components, including its architectural uniqueness.

The results of the sociological study led to the conclusions on optimization of the interaction of Russian and Chinese students in the educational space of a Russian university.

The problem of interaction between Russia and China has been a subject of quite a lot of domestic and foreign social and humanitarian studies. For example, Feng Yujun explores the socio-cultural interaction between the two countries through the specifics of political regimes that have historically evolved in different time periods [1]. Qin Ming formulates some features of socio-cultural exchange between China and Russia as constant expansion in the area of humanitarian cooperation with the dominating state model, the changing educational environment of Russian and Chinese universities [2]. Jiang Weixing [3] and G. Hofstede [4] in their research record the civilization similarity of Russians and Chinese based on the dominance of collective values in both nations.

Domestic sinologists V.V. Malyavin and A.A. Maslov [5] consider various aspects of the interaction of Russia and China, highlighting ideological, religious and value components. The works of N.V. Varlamov, V.V. Kalita, N.V. Vinichuk, E.B. Popkova, S.Yu. Raspertova are dedicated to the problems of enculturation and worldview contradictions. Adaptation and socialization is considered as the main problem field of interaction between Russians and Chinese in the works of I.A. Grebennikova, O.I. Danilenko, S.V. Dementieva, A.V. Kravtsova, A.G. Larina, S.I. Modnova S.I., Ukhova, E.V. Nikitenko, I.A. Savchenko, A.N. Sukhova, etc.

2. Results
One of the main reasons causing problems in the socio-cultural interaction between Chinese and Russian students is the inconsistency of the cultural space of the native and host cultures. By socio-
cultural space, we understand the system of sustainable value orientations, traditions that determine the lifestyle of its socio-ethnic groups.

Chinese students as carriers of their culture have a strict system of norms and moral values, the leading ones of which are family, submission to parents, respect for the elders, considering the needs of other people as more important than their own, modesty in presenting their achievements, conformity. According to N.V. Varlamova, S.A Rykova, I.E. Kirisheva, the traditional characteristics of Chinese people include collectivism, patriotism, patience, respect for the elders, pragmatism, the desire to save face (the tendency to show socially approved emotions in a conflict situation), persistence expressed in abiding by the strategy of “soft power”, perseverance, endurance, calm, discipline, a sense of national dignity, positive ethnic identity, high self-esteem [6, 7]. However, in our opinion, all these characteristics continuously are subject to change in the process of globalization and under the influence of Western culture, which sets new standards of behavior and dictates new values that inevitably affect the value orientation and behavioral characteristics of representatives of Chinese youth, especially in the socio-cultural space of a Russian university.

In the process of educational interaction, the values of Russian and Chinese youth get transformed. The socio-cultural and educational space of a university oriented at attracting foreign students undergoes changes. The Russian language courses are introduced, learning material for foreign students is adapted, the English language is becoming a common language of international communication, special leisure activities are held. They are targeted at creating an atmosphere of tolerance in the student environment.

As a result of the study, five main levels of social interaction were identified in the space of a Russian university: connectivity, translation, transcensus, adaptation, intercultural dialogue. At the first stage of social interaction (connectivity), many representatives of the Russian and Chinese cultures see differences in each other’s values already at the first acquaintance. The basic cultural and religious differences lead to all other dissimilarities named by the students: in attitudes to education, politics, each other, to themselves, family and marriage. Therefore, in order to successfully build social and cultural interactions, it is important, first of all, that both sides become familiar with the cultural and religious specifics of each other’s nations respectively.

The analysis of the results of the research demonstrates that at the initial stage of education, which corresponds to the first and second levels of social interaction (connectivity and translation), Chinese students are characterized by an average level of information and analytical component of social and cultural interaction (M = 27.6), reflecting the knowledge of the culture of their people and other cultures; motivation and evaluative component (M = 27.9), reflecting the degree of tolerance towards people of a different culture, and social and communicative component (M = 25.3), reflecting the skills of intercultural communication. A low level was revealed in relation to the creative activity component, reflecting the desire for joint socially significant and leisure activities and communication with representatives of other cultures (M = 24.1). These results demonstrate insufficient experience of joint activities, including leisure activities of Chinese and Russian students at the initial stages of education in Russian universities.

The stage of graduation from Ekaterinburg universities, which corresponds to the third and fourth levels of social interaction (transcensus and adaptation), a different situation was observed, that demonstrates the results of the process of enculturation of Chinese students in the educational process in the socio-cultural conditions of Russian universities. According to statistical analysis using the Student's t-criterion, the Chinese students in the 4th year of their studies, in contrast to the 1-st and 2-nd year students, have statistically significantly high indicators of the components of socio-cultural interaction within the average level of development: information and analytical component M = 31.9; t = 4.1, p <0.01; motivation and evaluative component M = 32.2; t = 4.8, p <0.01; social and
communicative component $M = 31.7; t = 59, p < 0.01$; creative activity component $M = 32.4; t = 7.7, p < 0.01$.

No students with absolutely low levels of socio-cultural interaction were identified at the stage of graduation from university. Thus, Chinese students at the stage of graduation, unlike the 1-st and 2-nd year students, have statistically a significantly high level of tolerance in relations with Russian students (55%). They also have high awareness of the similarities and differences between the two cultures, proficiency in communicative and linguistic skills in social and cultural interaction in the Russian universities environment (40%).

Every second student in a group of the 4th-year Chinese students demonstrated extensive knowledge of Chinese and Russian cultures. They were able to highlight the similarities and differences between their own and other cultures. They were also striving to be engaged in the joint learning process and joint leisure activities with the Russian students. These changes create a possibility for moving to the fifth level of social interaction (intercultural dialogue), when the students are guided by personal qualities rather than the national peculiarities of the interlocutor. A common space is created for discussing topical issues and problems of interaction. Joint plans are developed. Joint events of interest and importance for both sides of the intercultural dialogue are held.

We have identified a set of factors affecting the functioning of the structure of interaction between Russian and Chinese students in the university space: the geopolitical situation, the cost and quality of education, adaptation of study courses for foreign students, comfortable educational environment of the university, difficulty of learning the language of the host country, high profile of education.

The geopolitical position of both countries is among the objective factors that primarily affect the Russian-Chinese interaction. Currently, the relations between Russia and China can be described as partnership. Not only a trade and economic cooperation between the two countries developing, but the cooperation in education, science and culture is also expanding. These factors meet the needs of China to create a harmonious and modernized state. This tendency is confirmed by interviews with the Chinese students studying at Russian universities. 76% underline that friendly relations between Russian and Chinese universities is a primary factor to serve as an incentive for the development of educational contacts.

One of the most significant factors influencing Russian-Chinese interaction is the difficulty of learning the language of the host country. 67% of respondents named this factor. The Chinese students, lacking the basic language training have difficulty communicating with Russian students and teachers resulting in their social isolation. A lack of everyday interpersonal communication leads to their inability to decipher information encoded in educational texts and non-verbal communication signals received when communicating with Russian students and teachers. Language training is closely related to such factor of the social and cultural interaction in the space of Russian universities as adaptation of training courses for foreign students. 56% of respondents indicated its importance. This includes communication of teachers with students in a foreign language, their readiness to be flexible to the requirements of foreign students in the learning process, the desire to preserve their own cultural identity and to accept the cultural identity of the Chinese students. Special multimedia classrooms are created at many universities in Ekaterinburg to serve this purpose. They provide a transfer of professional information not only in the academic form, but also in presentation form including non-verbal communication symbols accessible to representatives of Chinese youth.

The factor analysis conducted in the research demonstrated that the problems of interaction between the Russian and Chinese students are manifested in the assessment of the comfort of the university educational environment. This factor was rated as significant by 52% of Chinese students.
The comfort factor is determined by the mechanisms of adaptation, students’ integration into a new culture, the gradual acceptance of its norms, values, behavior patterns and other cultural elements. The adaptation process of foreign students in the university environment includes universal stages inherent in any intercultural interaction: experience of autonomy, assimilation and integration, each of which reflects the degree of awareness and assimilation of the new community socio-cultural values ensuring that they meet the requirements of a different social and cultural environment.

The socio-cultural interaction of students is conditioned, on the one hand, by the comfort of the educational environment, on the other – by a set of socio-psychological factors of interaction: the intensity of interaction, the number of foreign students, the official policy of the university and many others. In practice, there are various types of relationship between the mixed groups of Russian and Chinese students and the interaction of cultures which they represent. Some groups of foreign students completely lose their cultural uniqueness, others, on the contrary, retain their cultural identity and even promote their own cultural patterns among Russian youth. It should be noted that the Chinese students create a specific in-cultural environment in the space of a Russian university. For example, Ekaterinburg universities together with the Consulate of the People's Republic of China organize celebrations of the Chinese national holidays in which Russian students take an active part. The Chinese in their turn introduced specific graphic symbols and decoration at the festive events which were held in the Russian universities. One of the conditions that contribute to the creation of comfortable university environment is the mini campuses where Chinese students live. They are created in the traditional Russian student hostels. There the Chinese students are offered the opportunity to live in a more comfortable environment, to prepare traditional Chinese food and follow Chinese traditions.

The cost and quality of education also becomes a significant factor in choosing a university. 44% of respondents highlight its importance. Modern Chinese society is no longer focused on the low cost of education. Many joint educational programs provide additional offers at an extra cost to Chinese students. They provide additional Russian language instruction with an individual tutor, visits to cultural events. They get students familiar with the specifics and culture of the host country, provide a separate menu in the university canteen, etc. At the same time, the transition to the Bologna system in Russia allows Chinese students to receive a world-class quality education and to expand the possibilities for further academic mobility.

As a result, all the above factors of socio-cultural interaction contribute to the prestige of getting education in Russia. 37% respondents chose Russian universities for precisely this reason. Many Russian universities hold high positions in the universities global ranking, which makes Russian education more attractive for Chinese students. 52% of Chinese students studying in Russia indicated that Russian education is the most prestigious for them compared to education in other countries. Chinese students see studying at a Russian university as an opportunity to learn the Russian language, to get a job in the joint Russian-Chinese companies, to improve their social status and to ensure career growth.

It should be noted that joint agreements in the humanitarian area on cooperation between Russia and China give students the opportunity to receive a diploma from two universities – Russian and Chinese at the same time. This expands further employment opportunities for graduates.

3. Results and discussions
Many studies are devoted to the problems of socio-cultural interaction of Chinese students studying in Russian universities. Among the factors affecting this interaction, researchers have noted the difficulties of learning a foreign language and communicating in a foreign language social environment. For example, according to S.A. Rykova and I.E. Kirisheva, the language barrier arises,
first of all, in connection with the need to assimilate educational information in the host language, rather than communicating with other students. According to the authors, a characteristic feature of the socio-cultural interaction of Chinese students in Russia is that they do not seek to integrate into Russian society, and therefore a rather dense cultural and language barrier is constantly maintained between them and the host country. The language barrier as a problem of socio-cultural interaction is characteristic of 70% to 85% of foreign students. According to the study results, Chinese students are poorly adapted to the environment of a Russian university [7].

Research by N.V. Varlamova revealed that there is a low degree of contacts between the Russian and foreign students: 66% of students do not visit foreign students, 73% do not celebrate birthdays and public holidays together with foreign students, 74% do not go to the cinema or clubs together with foreign students, 74% do not participate in joint sports events [6]. These data indicate the closeness and poor social connection of the Chinese students.

Compared with other domestic studies, the data of our study allowed us to highlight a new aspect in the research of socio-cultural interaction: the dynamic change of the socio-cultural space of a Russian university under the influence of internationalization and multicultural education, in which a significant role is played by Chinese citizens studying at Russian universities. In particular, we note an increasing number of joint Russian-Chinese events, appearance of Chinese campuses in students’ hostels, special classrooms for Chinese students, Russian-Chinese student cultural events such as Chinese New Year, Russian-Chinese friendship evenings, etc. According to the results of the study, Russian students show an interest in the development of intercultural interaction with Chinese students, perceiving them as partners in a single educational process. In support of our data, we can cite the works of Jiang Weixing [3] and G. Hofstede [4], who analyze the aspects of mutual cooperation between the two countries. They also note successful contacts in education, based on the common historical traditions, proximity of the mentality and values of Russians and Chinese.

4. Conclusions
The results of the study have practical significance because they reveal the main levels of socio-cultural interaction between Russian and Chinese students in the space of the Russian university, as well as identify factors influencing this interaction. The identified features and problems of the socio-cultural interaction of Chinese and Russian students allow developing technologies to optimize the socio-cultural interaction of foreign students in educational process in Russian universities. This is especially important in the initial stages of education. Recommendations for optimizing the process of integrating Chinese students into the space of a Russian university, in addition to Russian language classes include joint Russian-Chinese leisure and festive events, creating joint social student associations such as volunteering, tourism, music and other creative associations, creating guided tours programs aimed at getting them familiar with the host country culture, joint interaction of Russian and Chinese students in social media and messengers. The above said creates a basis for the development of effective forms of interaction and the internationalization of Russian university space.

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