



# Armenia: China's increasing presence in schools and academia

Aksana Akhmedova

As China's presence in the South Caucasus grows, marked by Strategic Partnership Agreements with Georgia and Azerbaijan, Armenia remains the only country in the region not to have entered into a similar arrangement with Beijing. Nonetheless, recent developments suggest that progress has been made in economic and political relations between the Republic of Armenia (RA) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), with the educational sector emerging as an important area of cooperation.

Since gaining its independence in 1991, Armenia has entered into several agreements in the fields of science and education with the PRC. These include:

- The Agreement on Cooperation in the Fields of Culture, Education, Sports, Health, and Tourism (1992).
- The Agreement on Scientific and Technical Cooperation (1992).
- The Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Education (2000).
- The Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Documents on Education and Scientific Degrees (2015).

In addition, several supplementary documents have been signed to strengthen collaboration between specific agencies in the two countries. In 2012, for instance, a **Memorandum of Understanding** (MOU) was signed by Armenia's State Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science and China's Shanghai Institute of

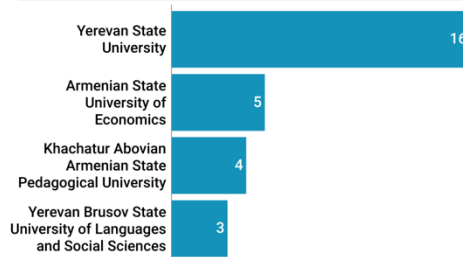
# Armenia's academic engagement with China

Insights from China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker

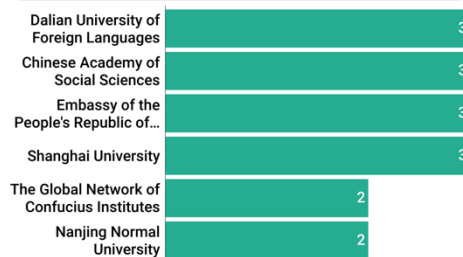


**37** Number of identified ties between Armenian universities and research institutes and Chinese entities

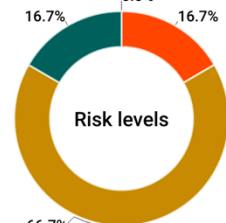
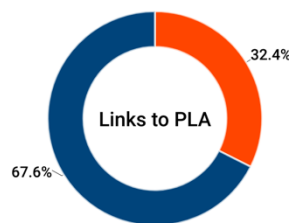
## The most active Armenian academic institutions



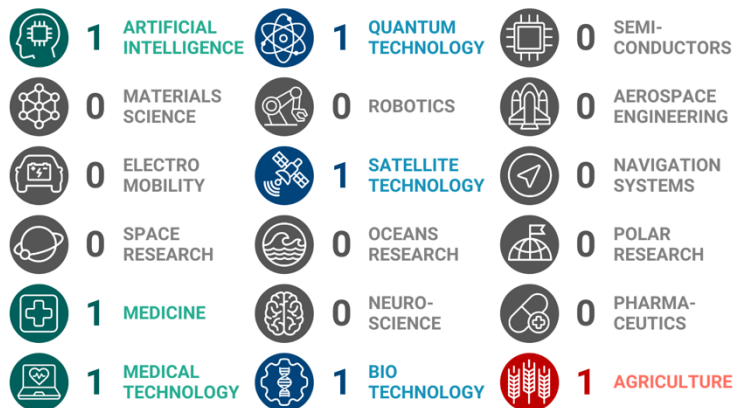
## The most active Chinese entities



## Cooperation with entities linked to the Chinese military



## Engagements focused on China's priority cooperation areas



Data: China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker | [www.academytracker.ceias.eu](http://www.academytracker.ceias.eu)

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Applied Physics. In 2022, an MOU titled “On Cooperation in the Field of Satellite Imagery Application” was signed by Armenia’s Science Committee of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports and its the National Academy of Sciences and China’s Center for Application of Satellite Remote Sensing of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

## Cooperation with Chinese universities

In line with the governmental approach, Armenian universities have actively formed associations with Chinese higher education institutions and organizations. Our research found 38 links between Armenian and Chinese entities. Notably, at least seven Armenian educational institutions have formed formal or informal partnerships with Chinese entities. These Sino-Armenian educational partnerships involve 20 Chinese universities, two Chinese state institutions, three Chinese research institutions, three other types of Chinese entities, one Confucius Institute, and one Chinese corporation. Key areas of cooperation include joint conferences, student and academic staff exchanges, training programs, and scientific research projects.

Most of the Chinese universities with which Armenian institutions have established formal partnerships are classified as potential security risks due to concerns caused by their participation in defense research and collaboration with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). However, Armenian universities have not published any documents addressing the challenges associated with such foreign institutions. Consequently,

there is a general lack of robust risk assessment mechanisms before formalizing partnerships with Chinese universities.

More than 66% of these potentially risky associations are with Yerevan State University. Other Armenian institutions that also have connections with Chinese universities, as indicated by the ASPI Tracker, include the Armenian State University of Economics, the Armenian State Pedagogical University, and the National University of Architecture and Construction. Around 66% of all connections are with medium-risk Chinese institutions, such as Shanghai University, Nanchang University, and Lanzhou University, and 16% are with high-risk institutions, like Zhejiang International Studies University.

Shanghai University (SHU) is referred to as a medium-risk organization by ASPI primarily due to its growing involvement in defense-related research. The university holds secret-level security credentials, enabling its researchers to participate in classified defense technology projects. In 2016, the Armenian State University of Economics entered into a preliminary agreement with SHU to establish formal bilateral relations. Additionally, SHU is a partner organization of the Center of Chinese Language and Chinese Culture at Armenia's Yerevan State University.

Lanzhou University (LZU) is designated as a medium-risk organization due to its involvement in defense research, as indicated by its expenditure of over RMB 50 million (€633,000) on defense-related projects. LZU postgraduate students receive scholarships from various defense companies, including those linked to China's nuclear weapons program. Despite these associations, LZU is listed as an official partner of Yerevan State University, according to the latter's official website.

Nanchang University (NCU) is also classified as a medium-risk institution. In 2018, the US government added NCU to its Unverified List, which includes entities over which end-user checks cannot be satisfactorily conducted to ensure compliance with export license regulations. Despite its questionable profile, NCU maintains cooperative ties with Armenia's National University of Architecture and Construction. In 2022, NCU announced a winter school program on Chinese language and culture for students of the Armenian university.

Unfortunately, most formal agreements established with Chinese institutions have not been publicly disclosed. However, unlike Georgia and Azerbaijan, where no signed agreements have been published, open sources reveal three formal agreements between Armenian and Chinese institutions. The disclosed documents are primarily established by or between state institutions and include:

- A **Memorandum of Cooperation** between Armenia's Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport and the Chinese Culture Translation and Studies Support Network (2019).
- An **Agreement on Cooperation** between the Armenian State Institute of Physical Culture and Sport and China's Capital University of Physical Education and Sports (2021).
- An **MOU** between Armenia's Science Committee of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports and its National Academy of Sciences and China's Land Satellite Remote Sensing Application Centre of the Ministry of Natural Resources (2022).

## Confucius Institutes in Armenia: An instrument of soft power

The PRC's primary soft power instrument, the Confucius Institute, has a single presence in Armenia, which has been located at the Yerevan Brusov State University of

Languages and Social Sciences since its establishment in 2009. The institute actively organizes and supports events that foster interest in Chinese language and culture. According to publicly available sources, the activities of the Confucius Institute are primarily concerned with cultural and linguistic topics. Thus, unlike the Confucius Institutes of other South Caucasian countries, such as Azerbaijan and Georgia, the Armenia-based institute does not explicitly promote issues such as the political ideology of the Chinese Communist Party or organize events related to the PLA.

With support from the Chinese government, this institute cooperates closely with its partner institution, the Dalian University of Foreign Languages (DLUFL) in the PRC. DLUFL plays a pivotal role as an academic counterpart for several Armenian educational institutions. Notably, a Confucius Classroom has been inaugurated at Chekhov School in Yerevan, while another was established at the Russian-Armenian University through joint initiatives with DLUFL.

With the support of the above-mentioned Confucius Institute, the Center of Chinese Language and Culture was established at Yerevan State University in 2015. The center cooperates with institutions such as the Dalian University of Foreign Languages, Shanghai University, Nanjing Pedagogical University, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Its primary functions include promoting the teaching of the Chinese language, fostering interest in Chinese cultural values, and organizing thematic courses, film screenings, exhibitions, and Olympiads related to the Chinese language, culture, religion, and history. For example, in 2021, the center co-organized an online conference titled “China and Armenia: Governance and High-Quality Cooperation within the Framework of the One Belt, One Road Initiative.”

Additionally, the Confucius Institute works closely with other Armenian institutions to disseminate the Chinese language and culture. For instance, in 2024, it partnered with Armenia’s Institute of Oriental Studies of the National Academy of Sciences to organize a conference titled “Cultural Dialogue: Armenia-China.”

Interestingly, the promotion of the Chinese language in Armenia extends beyond the activities of the Confucius Institute and its classrooms, encompassing secondary schools as well. During the aforementioned conference in 2024, the Chinese ambassador to Armenia, Fan Yong, stated, “Currently, more than 5,000 students are studying Chinese in Armenia. This process is not only taking place in universities but also in schools.”

The incorporation of a Chinese educational component into Armenian secondary education exemplifies the significant impact of Chinese influence on Armenian academia. In 2018, the Chinese-Armenian Friendship School was established in Armenia. The Chinese government allocated more than US\$12 million for the construction and equipment of the school, which offers intensive language courses taught by both Chinese and Armenian educators. As of 2024, the school had an enrollment of 685 students. The Confucius Institute supports its educational program and provides pathways for students to continue their education in China. To date, around 20 students from the school have pursued studies in the PRC, with education costs covered by the program, requiring students to pay only for transportation expenses.

## Engagement with Chinese think tanks and corporations

Other actors involved in academic cooperation with China include think tanks, such as the China-Eurasia Council for Political and Strategic Research, a bipartisan, nonprofit policy research organization. Established in 2016, it focuses on research related to international relations, security, and economic dynamics involving China and the Eurasian continent. It has formalized its collaborations through MOUs with prominent



Chinese universities, including the David C. Lam Institute for East-West Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University and the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China.

Armenian academia engages in cooperative relations not only with Chinese universities and state institutions but also with private companies, such as Huawei and NetDragon Websoft Holdings Limited. In 2021, Huawei launched its “Seeds for the Future” in partnership with Armenia’s Yerevan State University, Yerevan National Polytechnic University, and the American University. This program selected 20 outstanding students. The initiative aimed to allow participants to explore advanced technologies, including 5G, cloud computing, and AI. In 2020, NetDragon Websoft Holdings Limited launched an annual summer internship program for students at Armenia’s National University of Architecture and Construction that focused on fields such as Industrial Design, User Experience Design, Product Design, and Game Design.

## Recommendations for addressing potential challenges

Considering China's growing interest in the South Caucasus region, it is widely anticipated that the PRC’s engagement with regional countries, including Armenia, will expand significantly in the coming years. This development is expected to open up numerous opportunities for Armenian universities and academic institutions to strengthen ties with their counterparts in the PRC. Amid the evolving scenario of increasing Chinese presence in Armenia and its educational sector, the following recommendations may prove beneficial:

- Armenian institutions should exercise due diligence when collaborating with Chinese partners, carefully evaluating potential risks and benefits.
- Armenian state institutions should provide proactive and effective guidance to help Armenian academic entities navigate potential challenges in their partnerships with China.
- Collaborations should be aligned with Armenia’s national interests to ensure mutually beneficial outcomes.

**Visit the [China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker](#) and explore the data on [Armenia-China academic engagements](#).**

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# China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker

**China-Europe Academic Engagement Tracker** serves as a database of interactions between European academic institutions and Chinese entities. It was created by CEIAS and partners from investigated countries.

Along with the Tracker, country-level analyses were created to help better understand the specific circumstances of academic relations with Chinese entities in individual countries. They provide information on the significant points in regards to individual academic interactions, look at their current state, and identify what may improve them. They also map the current guidelines used by institutions involved in such interactions.

The goal of the Tracker is to provide a record of how European academic institutions engage with China so as to help understand the nature and volume of these interactions, as well as to improve their transparency. The Tracker can help with further research by individual scholars, provide the initial information for policy-making as well and help guide the universities themselves in establishing and improving their academic interactions.

## Project scope

The Tracker was launched in June 2022; however, due to its nature, it is subject to ongoing updates. At the point of the launch, the Tracker mapped the engagement of academic institutions from 11 European countries with their Chinese partners.

In some cases, especially the larger countries (like France, the UK, or Germany), investigated universities were sampled, with investigation priority put on researching China links of those academic institutions that would be considered the most significant - due to their overall internationalization, academic ranking, or dominant focus on research (especially in STEM fields).

The 11 European countries initially covered (data published in June 2022) by the project are Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. As of April 2025, data from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Greece, France, Luxembourg, Italy, and Slovenia were published on the Tracker.

## Methodology

To map the interaction of European academic institutions and Chinese entities, we have relied on data collected from various open sources. The methodology of this research has been built on previous research into the ties of Slovak academic institutions with Chinese entities published by CEIAS in December 2020.

The methodology consisted firstly of gathering data through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests (where applicable; otherwise similar approaches were used if possible) to the public universities and research institutes. We have used this method to gather data on the scope and outcomes of cooperation with Chinese entities, as well as to evaluate the financial flows between them. Filing the FOIA requests has also helped us to evaluate the overall openness of public academic institutions when it comes to their dealings with China.

Second, we juxtaposed the collected data with media coverage of various academic interactions and other public sources so as to broaden the scope of the information where possible. In cases where it is allowed (such as Slovakia or Czechia), we also relied on publicly disclosed contracts to help supplement and check the transparency of contracts signed as a part of various interactions.

Where available, we have also cross-referenced the collected data with the [China Defense University Tracker](#) by ASPI, which has allowed us to note instances of cooperation with entities linked to the People's Liberation Army and assign approximate risk levels. However, as ASPI itself notes, the fact that such a link is not recorded does not automatically indicate no risks are associated with cooperating with an institution.

## Caveats

Despite the large-scale data collection that took place, please take note that the data contained herein are not comprehensive. The reasons for this are twofold. First, given the nature of the data collection process, which relied on Freedom of Information Act requests and open source data collection, there is a risk that certain data were not included as they were not disclosed by the universities so far. Second, even though we strived to be as comprehensive as possible, in certain cases (e.g. France, Germany, Poland), local limitations forced us to rely on a sampling method in the data collection process, thus deviating from the general approach of collecting data on all the publicly financed academic institutions.

Despite these limitations, it is our view that shedding light on a large number of existing links, though not all of them, still contributes to the overall goal of this project, i.e. improving the transparency of the engagements between European and Chinese academia.

Nevertheless, we strive to overcome these limitations and plan to update the database. To this end, please do not hesitate to submit to us information about any links between European academic institutions and their Chinese partners.



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**Central European Institute of Asian Studies (CEIAS)** is an independent think tank focusing on Europe-Asia relations and developments in the Indo-Pacific region. Originally founded in 2007 in Slovakia, CEIAS is today a **transnational think tank with main branches in Bratislava (Slovakia), Prague (Czech Republic), and Vienna (Austria)**, and further regional presence in Poland, Hungary, Canada, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and beyond.

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**CEIAS researchers regularly comment for and publish op-eds in leading CEE and international media.** Our work has been featured in the Wall Street Journal, Foreign Policy, South China Morning Post, NHK, Deutsche Welle, Euractiv, CNA, The Diplomat, Voice of America, Radio Free Asia, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Euractiv, and other media.

Our outputs are referred to in the work of other thinktanks, e.g. Brookings (USA), Clingendael (Netherlands), MERICS (Germany), Institute for Security & Development Policy (Sweden), IFRI (France), ISPI (Italy), Global Taiwan Institute (USA), Prospect Foundation (Taiwan), ISEAS (Singapore), Elcano Royal Institute (Spain) and many others.

CEIAS analysis was also highlighted in the outputs of the **European Parliament** and the **U.S. Congress**.

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