

Growing Popularity of Russian-Chinese Double Degree Diplomas in Russia

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Abstract: Double degree programs in Russia began to appear during the period of Russia's desire to integrate into West-lead educational space. Double degree programs in Russia appeared primarily as an attempt of Russian universities to offer students the opportunity to obtain a diploma from prestigious European universities. Russian foreign policy has experienced enormous transformation after 2022. For Russia, in the current situation, the largest and most developed country preferable for educational cooperation is China. Currently, many Russian universities, both the leading and mediocre ones have already opened or are planning to open double degree programs together with Chinese universities in an attempt to increase the prestige of the educational services. The opening of double degree programs together with Chinese universities can already be called an emerging trend in the field of higher education in Russia.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the specifics of double degree programs for the Russian students implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities. General scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, abstraction and generalization, and a comparative approach were used as research methods. The research question is whether the trends inherent in double degree programs implemented by Russian and Western universities are also typical of the double degree programs implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities. The research made it possible to identify the peculiarities of such Sino-Russian double degree programs.

The specifics of double degree programs for the Russian students implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities include the predominance of bachelor degree programs over master's degree programs, most programs appeared during the last 10 years and there is growing popularity of Sino-Russian double degree programs, the programs are implemented by both leading and mediocre universities, the predominant specialization of such programs is business and management.

Keywords: Double degree program, double degree, higher education, Russia, China, Bologna Process, turn to the East.

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Introduction

Higher education is becoming transnational and universities worldwide are providing students with opportunities for internationalization (Hudzik, 2021; Lee & Gough, 2020) by offering double degree programs, short term and long-term study abroad courses, and opening international branches (Bamford, 2020; Steagall et al., 2021). Transnational higher education (TNHE) includes franchising, twinning, international joint and dual degree programs, branch campuses and online education (Lee & Gough, 2020; Li & Haupt, 2021).

Double degree programs in Russia appeared primarily as an attempt by Russian universities to offer applicants the opportunity to obtain a diploma from prestigious European universities. While studying under double degree program, a student could both receive a Russian and a European education, and also study abroad for some period of time. The desire of universities to introduce double degree programs can be explained by the desire to attract the most ambitious applicants and increase the prestige of the educational institution. Researches show that a second degree gives more opportunities in employment sectors and is related with a higher earning (Del & Hersch, 2008; Hemelt, 2010).

The implementation of double degree programs also leads to increased academic mobility of the university's teaching staff and students, which also affects the increase in the university's ranking (Gorelova & Polyakova 2015, 44). The implementation of double degree programs, in addition, entails an increase in the competitiveness of the university due to its integration into the international educational environment (Grinevich & Yu 2017, 194). An obvious result of university implementing double degree programs is the introduction of new methods and technologies of education, as well as an increase in the qualifications of professors and administrative staff (Bartosh & Kabakhidze 2016, 35).

Russian foreign policy has experienced enormous transformation recently of what is often called 'turn to the East' but is rather 'turn from the West' in its nature. The sphere of higher education has not escaped this transformation of the foreign policy vectors. After US and European countries' imposing sanctions on Russia in 2022 Russian universities have been reducing the number of joint educational programs with European partners. Russia started to seek substitutes in the spheres it used to cooperate with the Western partners, that now became extremely difficult to cooperate in. This paper examines the development trends of international double degree programs in Russia after 2022.

Double Degree Programs Development in Russia

Double degree programs in Russia began to appear during the period of Russia's desire to integrate into West-lead educational space. In the 1990s the first double degree programs appeared in Russia. In 2003, Russia joined the Bologna Process and became a partner in the creation of a common European higher education space. In 2003, with the adoption of the new Law "On Education", Russian universities received the right to establish connections with foreign universities and participate in international programs.

Cooperation between Russia and the European Union in the field of higher education and science should be viewed in the context of a unified space of science and education, the creation of which was agreed upon at the EU-Russia summit in 2005 (Lisichkina &

Ivannikova 2015). The emergence of double degree programs in Russia is a natural result of international cooperation between universities in Russia and European countries (Lisichkina & Ivannikova 2015).

In 2010, the European Commission conducted an analytical study of double degree programs between EU countries and the Russian Federation, which identified 74 universities and 239 double degree programs operating in Russia. The largest number of universities implementing double degree programs with European partners was concentrated in the Central Federal District of Russia. There were 24 of them, which made 33% of the total number of universities in Russia. In the Northwestern Federal District there were 16 universities (22%). In the North Caucasus Federal District, only one university was involved in the development of this program (Sinyatkin et al, 2010).

In Russian program practice, the most common double degree programs with European universities used to be economic and management programs; they made up about 45% of the total number of double degree programs (Sinyatkin et al 2010).

An analysis of both European and Russian practice shows that most double degree programs were Master's degree programs. Thus, according to 2009 data, double degree programs for Master's programs prevailed in Europe - 528, doctoral programs were in the second place - 127, and Bachelor's programs were in the third place - 12 (Torres 2014, 50-51). Another study aimed at studying double degrees between Russian and European universities was conducted in 2010. 239 double degree programs were identified in 74 Russian universities, of which 55 were Bachelor's programs, 19 were specialist training programs, 148 were master's programs, and 17 were postgraduate programs (Burquel et al 2014, 27).

Until 2022, most double degree programs were implemented by leading Russian universities together with European universities, primarily with universities located in France, Germany and the UK. In 2022, with the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and the imposition of sanctions on Russia, most European universities have suspended cooperation with Russian universities.

The joint double degree program between Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) and the University of Reading (UK) in Politics and International Relations has been suspended. The joint double degree program of The Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration (RANEPA) with the University of London "Law and Global Legal Practice", and the joint program of RANEPA with the University of the Côte d'Azur (France) "Financial control and government audit" have been closed. Now this program does not imply the issuance of a second diploma as it implies studying in Russia only. The joint program of the Financial University with the Business School of Southern Champagne (France) BSc in International Business has been closed, as well as the double degree program of the Financial University with the University of Buckingham (Hungary) Bachelor of Arts Management. The joint double degree program between Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia and the University of Nice (France) "World Economy" has been closed (Koshman 2024).

At the same time, enrollment in a limited number of double degree programs with European universities remains, in particular, MGIMO continues to implement double degree programs with the

Swiss School of International Relations “International Finance and Investment Management” and “International Law and Comparative Law” (MGIMO University 2024; Koshman 2024). Patrice Lumumba Peoples' Friendship University of Russia has maintained cooperation with French universities (Smapse Education 2022).

In the current situation, the largest and most developed country for Russia to cooperate with in the sphere of education is China. It is also important that Chinese universities are highly rated in international rankings. Thus, in the QS World University Rankings 2023, 35 out of the 500 best universities in the world, are Chinese ones (QS World University Ranking 2023).

Against the backdrop of worsening relations between the Russian Federation and Western countries, one can trace the reorientation of Russian universities to work with China. A striking example is the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) program “International Program in Economics and Finance,” which was implemented jointly with the University of London until 2022. Since 2024, the Southwest University of Finance and Economics SWUFE in Chengdu (China) has become a partner university (Koshman 2024).

It is also worthwhile mentioning Synergy University, which seems to be trying to fit into current geopolitical trends to the greatest extent and offer interesting and in-demand programs to the students interested in obtaining diplomas from foreign universities. It is now offering and actively promoting a Bachelor’s double degree program in “international trade” with Shantou University (China), and is also beginning enrollment in double degree programs with universities in such “friendly” countries as the United Arab Emirates and Serbia. In advertising for obtaining a diploma from a Serbian university, the emphasis is made on obtaining a European education. In the advertisement of the joint Russian-Chinese program the focus is made on the growing importance of the Chinese economy (Synergy University n.d.).

Currently, many Russian universities, both the leading and mediocre ones have already opened or are planning to open double degree programs together with Chinese universities in their attempt to increase the prestige of the educational services (Kukharensko 2024). The opening of double degree programs together with Chinese universities can already be called an emerging trend in the field of higher education in Russia.

The “Concept of the Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad,” approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated September 05, 2022 emphasized the relevance of promoting, disseminating and scaling the practice of implementing double degree programs and creating joint foreign states of educational institutions of higher education on their territories (President of Russia 2022). The same Decree of the President of the Russian Federation noted the special importance of developing bilateral humanitarian cooperation with China (President of Russia 2022).

Methods

The systematic literature review was conducted within the Russian Index of National Citation database. The search was conducted searching for the following phrases: ‘Russian Chinese double degree program’ or ‘double degree program’. The search for these phrases was conducted within titles, abstracts and keywords in September 2024 without any limitation in the search time-span covering publication up until that month. Further exclusions were performed by qualitative analysis of research abstracts in order to select articles by using website analysis as the primary method. The research was then limited to publications in the research area of education. The study utilized Qualitative Comparative Analysis in analyzing Russian-Chinese double degree programs.

Top 500 Chinese and top 500 Russian universities were systematically selected on the basis of national rankings. Their websites were thoroughly analyzed. 9 Russian universities and 14 Chinese universities that implement 24 Russian-Chinese double degree programs for Russian students were selected. The websites of the universities that are going to launch Russian-Chinese double degree programs soon were also analyzed.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the specifics of double degree programs for the Russian students implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities. Information about the nature of double degree programs was taken from the official websites of universities. Uni Rank World Universities Search Engine was used to identify universities ranking.

The research question is whether the trends inherent in double degree programs implemented by Russian and Western universities are also typical of the double degree programs implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities.

The study aims to confirm or refute the following theses formed as a result of extrapolating the tendencies typical of Russian-European double degree programs and the analysis of the geopolitical tendencies:

1. Most double degree programs with Chinese universities in Russia are opened by leading Russian universities with leading Chinese universities;
2. A significant proportion of Russian-Chinese double degree programs appeared after 2022.
3. The main direction of training in double degree programs is economics.
4. The main level of training is master's degree.

Results

The research made it possible to identify the specifics of double degree programs for the Russian students implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities.

24 double degree programs implemented by 9 Russian universities in partnership with 14 Chinese universities were analyzed. Table 1 gives a detailed description of the programs.

Table 1. Double degree programs implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities

	Russian University	University ranking	Chinese partner university	University ranking	Program, degree, year
1	MGIMO University	20	University of International Business and Economics (Beijing)	100	economics, (bachelor, since 2015)
2	Moscow Aviation Institute	37	Shanghai Jiao Tong University	3	1. Aircraft manufacturing (bachelor, since 2019); 2. Engine Engineering (bachelor, since 2019); 3. Rocket Science (bachelor, since 2019) 4. Aircraft engines (master, since 2017); 5. Design of aircraft structures made of polymer composite materials (master, since 2017); 6. Project management in the high-tech industry (master, since 2017); 7. Mathematical modeling in the design of aircraft (master, since 2023); 8. Aerospace engineering (master, since 2023).
3	Vladivostok State University	n/a	Dalian Ocean University	439	Economics (bachelor, since 2013).
4	Autonomous non-profit organization of higher education 'University under the interparliamentary assembly of EURASEC'	n/a	Capital Normal University	128	Law (bachelor, since 2021)
5	Autonomous non-profit organization of higher education 'University under the interparliamentary assembly of EURASEC'	n/a	Dalian University of Foreign Languages	269	Economics (bachelor, since 2021)
6	Autonomous non-profit organization of higher education 'University under the interparliamentary assembly of EURASEC'	n/a	Hebei University	209	Advertising and PR (bachelor, since 2022)
7	Synergy University	10	Shantou University	126	International Trade Practices (bachelor, since 2023)
8	Baikal State University	228	University of International Business and Economics (Beijing)	100	1. Economics (bachelor, since 2019); 2. Trading business (bachelor, since 2019).
9	Baikal State University	228	Shenyang Ligong University	250	Business management (bachelor, since 2020).
10	Ufa University of Science and Technology	42	Liaoning University	162	International Economics and Trade (bachelor, since 2021).
11	Nizhny Novgorod State Pedagogical University	129	Anhui Normal University	187	Pedagogical Education: foreign (English) language and foreign (Chinese) language (bachelor, since 2016, resumed after being suspended during pandemic in 2022)
12	Finance Academy under the Government of the Russian Federation	18	Dalian Neusoft University of Information	436	1. Software development technologies (bachelor, since 2024); 2. Data Engineering (bachelor, since 2024).

13	Finance Academy under the Government of the Russian Federation	18	Liaoning University	162	Global Politics (bachelor, since 2023).
14	Finance Academy under the Government of the Russian Federation	18	Jilin University	21	International Economics and Trade (bachelor, since 2024).
15	Finance Academy under the Government of the Russian Federation	18	Shandong University of Finance and Economics	154	International Economics and Business Engineering (bachelor, since 2022).

Only 5 (20.8%) out of 24 Sino-Russian double degree programs are master's degree program, 19 programs (79.2 %) are bachelor degree programs.

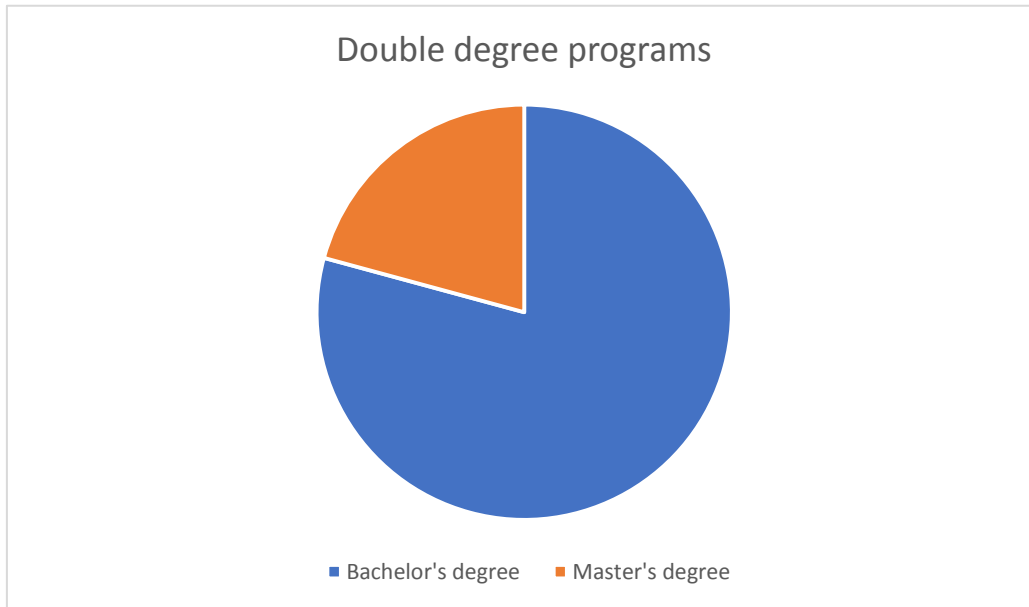


Fig.1 Double degree programs

10 (41.7 %) out of 24 double degree programs are in the field of business, trade and economics. 8 programs (33.3 %) are in the field of hi-tech industry, all of them are implemented by Moscow Aviation Institute in partnership with Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Other specializations include IT (2 programs, 8.3 %), politics (1 program, 4.2 %), law (1 program, 4.2 %), pedagogics (1 program, 4.2 %), advertising and PR (1 program, 4.2 %).

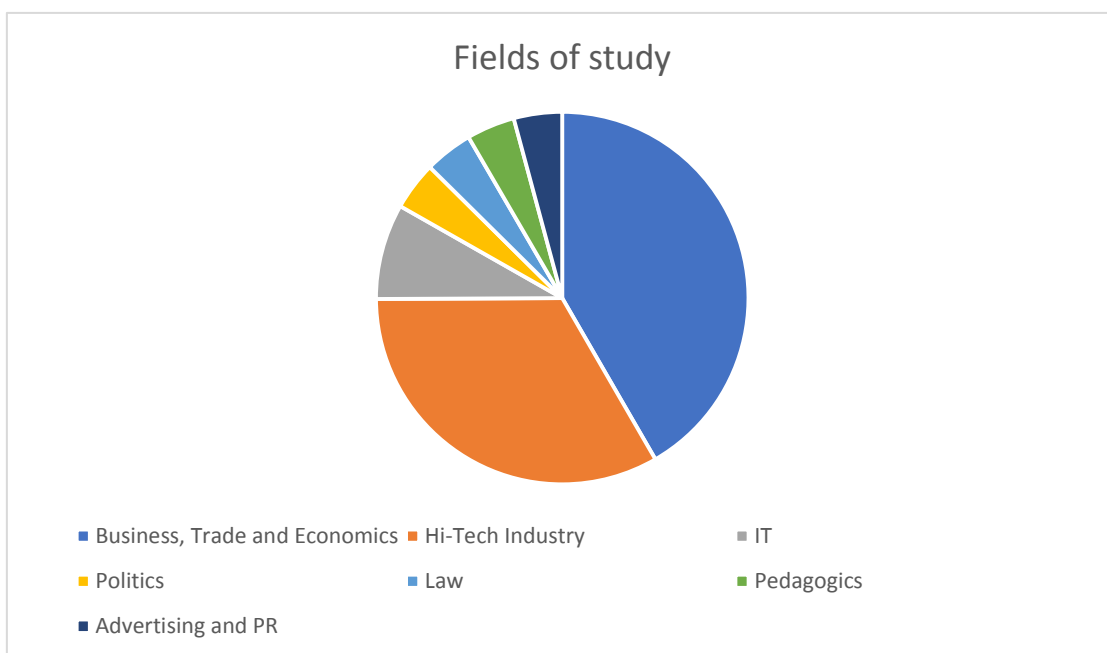


Fig.2 Fields of study

9 programs (37.5 %) appeared after 2022 (implementation of western sanctions on Russia and only one program (4.2 %) appeared before 2014, the beginning of acute stage of Russia's conflict with the West over Ukraine.

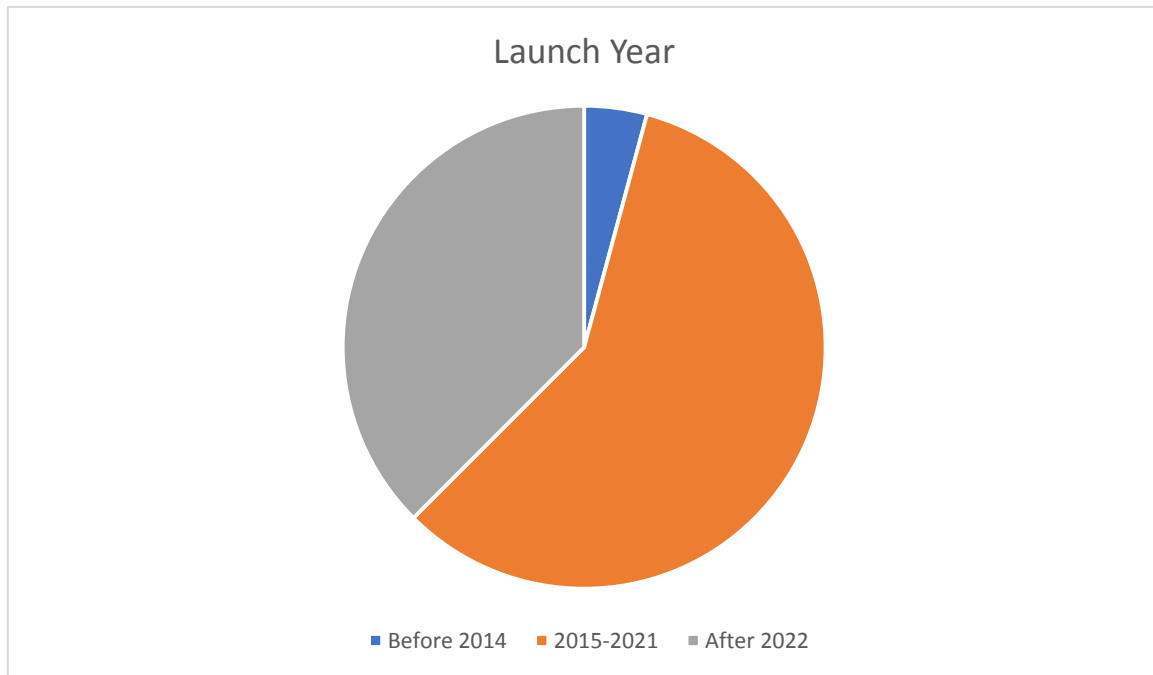


Fig.3 Launch year

In addition, starting in 2022, the launch of new dual degree programs with China is announced (not listed in the table of programs we analyzed):

In 2022, within the framework of the agreement signed between the universities and the dual degree program, North Caucasus Federal University (NCFU) with Dalian University (China) is developing four educational tracks: software development; computer science and engineering; mechanical engineering and automation; electronic information technology (TASS 2024).

A dual degree program was launched between Ufa University and Shenyang Technological University (2023) in the direction of "Electromechanics and Automation" (Ufa University 2023).

In 2023, an Agreement was signed between Kazan Innovative University, East Liaoning University and the Center for International Language Exchange and Cooperation of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China on the creation of a dual degree program in the field of study 38.03.02 Management (bachelor's degree) Hospitality Management (with study of the Chinese language), tuition funded by a grant from the Ministry of Education of China (Tatar Inform 2023).

In 2023, the Russian State Pedagogical University named after A. I. Herzen (RSPU named after A. I. Herzen) and Shandong Normal University (SNU, China) agreed to create joint dual degree programs (Herzen State Pedagogical University 2023).

MGIMO and the China Foreign Affairs University (Diplomatic Academy of the People's Republic of China) are about to launch a joint dual degree program.

In April 2024, the International Institute of Economics and Finance of the National Research University Higher School of Economics opens a dual degree program jointly with the Research Institute of

Economics and Management of the Southwest University of Finance and Economics (RIEM) in the bachelor's degree programs "Economics" and "Finance", students will bear the costs of tuition only at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Higher School of Economics 2024).

The study showed that the trends typical of double degree programs implemented by Russian and Chinese universities only partly coincide with the Western universities for double degree programs are only partly similar to the trends of double degree programs implemented by Russian universities in partnership with Chinese universities, and in some respects they differ significantly.

1. Double degree programs with Chinese universities in Russia are opened by Russian and Chinese universities from the top, bottom and middle of the ranking. No correlation of the university ranking and opening a Russian-Chinese double degree program was found.
2. A significant proportion of Russian-Chinese double degree programs (37.5 %) appeared after 2022, while only one program (4.2 %) appeared before 2013. Many Russian universities are planning to launch double degree programs in partnership with Chinese universities in the nearer future.
3. The main direction of training in double degree programs is economics, business and trade (41.7 %), while a significant part is high-tech (33.3 %).
4. The predominant level of training unlike with European universities is bachelor's degree (83.3 %).

Limitations of Research

Unfortunately, official websites of Russian universities do not always contain up-to-date information about joint educational programs being implemented. The announced programs (2022–2024) have not yet appeared in the list of those being implemented

(therefore, they are not presented in the table). Presumably, this is due to the untimely updating of information on university websites, and the inaccessibility of information on websites. It is problematic to find information about the start of joint educational programs; cooperation agreements are posted only at a few universities. This may be due to the fact that in accordance with the RF Government Resolution of 06.06.2023 No. 937 "On the suspension of paragraphs 11 and 14 of the Rules for posting on the official website of an educational organization in the information and telecommunications network "Internet" and updating information about an educational organization" until 31.12.2023, the posting of information on concluded and planned to be concluded agreements with foreign and (or) international organizations on education and science on the official websites of educational organizations was suspended. Since 01.01.2024, the requirement to post information on concluded and planned to be concluded agreements on websites has been resumed, however, to date, as already noted, not all universities have the relevant information.

Conclusion

Double degree programs in Russia appeared primarily as an attempt by Russian universities to offer students the opportunity to obtain prestigious European education. In fact, such European universities could be even not included in TOP 100 of any commonly recognized ranking. This phenomenon can be explained by the overwhelming desire of Russia to be integrated into the big European family. Gradual 'Turn to the East' in the sphere of higher education could be seen after the events of 2014, when western countries' and Russia's difference in views on Crimea and Ukraine became obvious. In 2022, with the start of the acute stage of Russian-Ukrainian conflict, not even a fracture, but a complete collapse in scientific and educational cooperation between Russia and Western countries occurred. China became a substitute for Russia in many of the spheres it used to cooperate with Europe and the US before. Cooperation between Russian and Chinese educational organizations have been intensively developing recently and has a great potential to grow.

Chinese universities are increasingly replacing European partners. The opening of double degree programs with Chinese universities instead of programs implemented jointly with European universities is the current trend in the development of international double degree programs in Russia.

Some universities offer double degree programs with other friendly countries - the United Arab Emirates, Serbia, CIS countries, Mongolia, etc. However, none of these countries' universities can surpass Chinese ones in ranking and attractiveness for foreign students.

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