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# Poland–China Educational Cooperation before the COVID-19 pandemic: University of Łódź Case Study

## Abstract

*This article examines the University of Łódź's educational cooperation before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. By analyzing educational and research interactions within the broader framework of Poland-China bilateral relations, both from historical and contemporary perspectives, the author argues that the intensity of contacts between University of Łódź and Chinese counterparts has often been dependent upon fluctuations in the political relations between the two countries and that despite initial enthusiasm the cooperation is now heading on more realistic tracks.*

**Keywords:** *Poland–China relations, sister cities, regional cooperation, University of Łódź, China studies, Asian studies*

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, cooperation in higher education has become an important part of bilateral relations between Poland and China, especially after they concluded their strategic partnership in 2011 and extended it to the level of comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016. The 2011 strategic partnership strengthened the role of local authorities in bilateral relations. Article 7 of the document stated that “both sides express their satisfaction with the current stage of local government exchange and will promote interprovincial and intercity cooperation, to deepen

the understanding of the society of both countries and to promote local economic development and cultural and educational exchange" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC, 2011). Łódź is an important example of this. Acknowledging the city's role in developing Polish–Chinese subnational relations, the 2015 edition of the Poland–China Regional Forum was held in the town. Among the numerous local agreements signed at the Forum, the one on cooperation in higher education, concluded between the Governor of Henan province and the Polish Minister of Higher Education, was of particular importance (Renmin Ribao, 2016; Mierzejewski, 2018).<sup>1</sup>

Although the cooperation between the University of Łódź (UŁ) and China dates back to the 1950s, a new phenomenon has emerged in recent years. With the growing importance of relations between Polish and Chinese cities and regions (Kamiński & Gzik, 2021), UŁ's cooperation with its Chinese counterparts has gained dynamism, often involving (though by no means limited to) the activities of educational partners based in Łódź's Chinese sister cities and provinces. However, it is mainly the favorable geographical location of Łódź that makes it attractive for China, due to trade opportunities associated with the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The most important example is the rail freight line between Chengdu and Łódź, linking China's western and central provinces with Europe by the China-Europe railway. Due to the railway connection, which laid the ground for regional cooperation between Łódź and Sichuan, Łódź was identified in the Chinese media as an important centre for the promotion of Polish–Chinese contacts at the local level (Kowalski, 2021, pp. 206–207).

Based on the rail project initiated by private companies, the Łódzkie-Sichuan cooperation illustrates how the development of rail connections translates into the institutionalization of bilateral ties and attracts the interest of central authorities. Cooperation between Łódź and Chengdu was formalised in June 2015 within the framework of sister cities. Following this agreement, the municipal and regional governments of Łódź city and Łódź Voivodship set up a representative office in Chengdu in April 2014, and the Chengdu municipal government established an office in Łódź in

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1 More than 450 representatives from local governments, businesses and science institutes from China, from the provinces of Sichuan, Hebei, Henan, Guilin and Guangdong and the cities of Chengdu, Chongqing, Shanghai, and Ningbo took part in the Forum. During the meetings, representatives of local governments and businesses of both countries signed several agreements on economic investment, and on cultural and scientific collaboration.

June 2015. The major purpose of the offices is to support commercial, cultural, and educational connections between the two regions. However, the results of these efforts are far below expectations, especially on the Polish side. They did not translate into an inflow of Chinese investments or a substantial presence of Polish exporters on the Chinese market. These are limited by the asymmetry of potential, Central Europe's position in Chinese economic expansion, personal factors on the central and local level, and finally, by growing US–China trade and political tensions (Kowalski, 2021).<sup>2</sup>

By analyzing educational and research interactions in the broader framework of Poland-China bilateral relations, both from historical and contemporary perspectives, the author argues that the intensity of contacts between the University of Łódź and Chinese counterparts has often been dependent upon fluctuations in the political relations between the two countries, which the COVID-19 pandemic has further limited. To this end, the article seeks to answer the following questions: to what extent do central-level relations influence regional cooperation? What are the main achievements and challenges of China studies at the UŁ? What are the main drivers of UŁ's cooperation with China?

The study subsequently outlines the history of the University of Łódź's educational cooperation with China and the main departments that carry out the partnership. In the last section, by highlighting the institutional framework and the practical outcomes of collaboration, the paper assesses the positive and the negative results of UŁ–China interactions.

## 2. Comrades in Educational Arms: Early Days of Sino-UŁ Cooperation

In May 1945, with the end of the Second World War in Europe, the University of Łódź was founded, as were other higher educational institutions including Politechnika Łódzka (Łódź University of Technology), the National Film School, the Medical Academy and the Academy of Fine Arts. Therefore, within a short span of time Łódź became a major educational centre in Poland. The story of Łódź's academic cooperation

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2 However, as far as institutional presence is concerned, the most important result was the establishment of Poland's consulate general in Chengdu in June 2016, the fourth Polish consular mission to China after Shanghai, Canton and Hong Kong SAR.

with China starts at the School of Polish for Foreign Students (SPFS). The development of SPFS (and the post-war teaching of foreigners in Poland) began in the early 1950s, in a political landscape of growing tensions between capitalist and socialist countries.<sup>3</sup> SPFS is the oldest institution in Poland specialising in teaching Polish as a foreign language and remained the only one in Poland until the 1970s. Indeed, apart from the Polish courses for foreigners organised at the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University from 1931 to 1939, there was no tradition of teaching Polish as a foreign language in Poland until the 1950s.

Cooperation with China has constituted an important part of SPFS' work since its foundation. In the roughly half a century between the establishment of the SPFS until the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, more than 300 students from China enrolled there (Wielkiewicz-Jałmużna, 2008, pp. 72–73).<sup>4</sup> Why was 1950s Łódź chosen as the site for teaching Polish as a foreign language? Given that the majority of foreigners were coming from socialist or developing countries, it is likely that Łódź, as a purely industrial city, was seen through the Cold War political lenses as “red.” In the academic year 1956/1957, 42 Chinese studied at the SPFS, the largest single group at the school (Wielkiewicz-Jałmużna, 2005, pp. 180–181). It may also be assumed that this is why Prime Minister Zhou Enlai (the highest-ranking PRC official to have visited the city to date) visited Łódź during a tour of Poland in January 1957. This visit took place in the midst of warming Sino-Polish relations, during a period of development in political and cultural interaction<sup>5</sup> and people-to-people

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3 At present, having gone through the process of institutionalisation and formal incorporation into University structures, combined with seven-decades of teaching experience, the Łódź school offers Polish courses at all levels of proficiency and various degrees of intensity. According to the SPFS, the School of Polish Language for Foreign Students has already received more than 15,000 students, with graduates representing 80% of the foreigners studying in Poland.

4 In the period between 1952/1953 and 2001/2002 (excluding 1957/58, 1958/59, 1961/62 and 1966/67), 233 students from China attended the SPFS. However, the first Asian students, and the first foreigners as such, were a group of 132 North Koreans. Their arrival in the 1952/53 academic year was related to the outbreak of the Korean War (1950–1953) and the fact that Poland, as a fellow socialist country, showed solidarity with North Korea. Officially, the Polish government was responding to the United Nations war relief call, yet the foremost reason for the students' stay was the need to train medics and engineers who were desperately needed in a country destroyed by Cold War rivalry.

5 Emblematic in this regard is the 1957 book *Country at Yangtze*, by the noted Polish historian and essayist P. Jasienica (1909–1970), written as result of his six-week travel to China in 1956.

exchanges, occurring as a result of China's conditional support of the political process of de-Stalinisation in Poland ("October 56," or "the Polish Thaw") (Shen & Li, 2007).

The first cooperative agreement between SPFS and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) was signed in 1985, though the beginning of this cooperation dates back to the 1950s. In its early years, cooperation was chiefly driven by the SFPS. The University of Łódź has sent lecturers to China as experts on the Polish language since the 1960s, and still does so today. Among them were Tadeusz Jeromin, Tadeusz Zwierzchowski, Bożena Zaorska and Lucyna Wawrzyńczak. The agreement remains active on a faculty level, and the main field of study is Polish Philology, with special emphasis on the translation of Polish literature into Chinese. In 1990, in collaboration with Beijing Foreign Studies University, UŁ publishing house published its "Small Polish-Chinese Dictionary" (compiled by Tadeusz Jeromin and Ding Wei. Including more than 5.000 words, the text was initially envisioned for Chinese students of the Polish language at the SFPS. However, the University of Łódź Press, acknowledging the lack of any other Polish-Chinese dictionary at that time, decided to make it more widely available, including for other Polish students interested in studying the Chinese language.

The primary role of the SFPS was to enable foreigners to study at Polish universities. However, with the post-1989 political and economic transformation, the school expanded its profile academically and educationally. This was a period when the number of Chinese students shrank due to the rising costs of studying and living in Poland. Now, 20 Chinese students choose this path annually. In this regard, three major motivations for studying the Polish language can be defined, based on the Chinese students studying at SPFS. First is the ambition to learn the Polish language and about Polish culture, in order to take up full-time studies at Polish universities taught in Polish. The second motivation is driven by the necessity of work requirements or trade negotiations (language as a business tool). The third, though the least frequent, relates to scholarships granted by the BFSU (six stipends in 2018). Here it is worth mentioning that Chinese graduates of the SPFS include Professor Zhang Gao, Dean of the School of European Languages and Cultures and head of the Department of Polish Language and Culture at BFSU, Professor Li Yanan, the first Chinese student to receive a PhD in Poland (in the Polish language programme), from the University of Silesia's Department of Philology, and professionals and senior management staff at Huawei and Stalowa Wola steel works.

Despite multi-layered cooperation, Poland (and other Central and Eastern European countries) and their respective educational institutions are often a “plan B” for Chinese students, who prefer to study in the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the UK, or at least in Western Europe.

### **3. Promoting Chinese Language and Culture: Chinese teachers at the Foreign Language Centre of the University of Łódź**

Apart from extensive experience and proven methods of teaching Polish as a foreign language, there is also a three-decade long tradition of teaching Chinese language at UŁ. Based on a Sino-Polish intergovernment agreement, there have since 1988 been 14 teachers of Chinese language working at the Foreign Language Centre of the University of Łódź. Lecturers in Chinese language usually take two-year teaching contracts and are senior lecturers. Although the course has always been optional, it has delivered a high-level programme. Many students who graduated over the three decades of Chinese language courses at UŁ are now at various departments of Sinology and Asian Studies throughout Poland. Since the 2000s, a compulsory Chinese language course has been offered at the Faculty of International and Political Studies, mostly attended by Asian Studies students (BA degree in Polish and English) and Oriental Studies (MA degree in Polish).

The Chinese language teachers, besides leading course groups, are involved in the organisation of many different events, such as the all-Polish research conferences dedicated to teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and Chinese language and culture contests. It has also become a tradition that each of the Chinese teachers residing in Łódź oversees a “Chinese Day,” an annual or bi-annual event aimed at promoting Chinese language and culture.

### **4. Main Drivers of UŁ’s Cooperation with China**

The primary UŁ unit that cooperates with China in research and education is the Department of Asian Studies (DAS, which was DEAS, the Department of East Asian Studies, until 2016), established in 2005 as part of the Institute of International Studies at the Faculty of International

and Political Studies (FIPS) of University of Łódź. The department is chaired by Professor Małgorzata Pietrasiak. Apart from teaching (Asian Studies degree, MA in Polish and BA in English), DAS develops in-depth research into Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Vietnamese internal and foreign policies. To that end, DAS researchers have received numerous Polish National Science Centre grants to study sovereign wealth funds in Asia, paradiplomacy in Europe, China, Russia and India, identity in China's foreign policy, China's multilateralism in the Developing World, the role of cities and regions in European Union's policy towards China, institutional changes in Japan's foreign policy, neoclassical realist analysis of Japan's policy on history problems, and the evolution of the core executive under the Shinzō Abe administration. In 2019 Gu Hongfei, the first-ever student from the PRC to receive a PhD from the University of Łódź, defended a thesis in political science at DAS. Having graduated from UŁ, Mr. Gu continued his research on China-Central European relations as a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. Since 2017, DAS has also been engaged in the EU-funded Horizon 2020 project of Competing Regional Integrations in Southeast Asia (CRISEA), with DAS's Professor Tomasz Kamiński acting as a member of its Steering Committee. This interdisciplinary research project included institutions from seven EU Member States and six Southeast Asian countries (Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam).<sup>6</sup>

DAS also carries out numerous Asia-related projects, among them study tours to Asian countries<sup>7</sup> and the annual academic Łódź-East Asia Meeting (LEAM) conference. Since it began in 2002, LEAM has brought together scholars, researchers and students in all disciplines, specialising

6 CRISEA consortium included École française d'Extrême-Orient (France), the University of Hamburg (Germany), the University of Naples L'Orientale (Italy), the Institute of Social and Political Sciences (Portugal), University of Łódź (Poland), The University of Oslo (Norway), the University of Cambridge (UK), the University of Chiang Mai (Thailand), Centre for Strategic and International Studies (Indonesia), Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines), the University of Malaya (Malaysia), Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (Vietnam) and the University of Mandalay (Myanmar).

7 In regard to students' tours to China, the very first was themed as "China's Two Rivers - research expedition" (held from 20 August to 8 September 2005). Assisted by Professor Li Mingqi from Shandong University and UŁ doctoral candidate Włodzimierz Cieciora, a group of students and lecturers from the University of Łódź visited such places as Jinan, Nanjing and Shanghai. The research objectives of the trip covered China's political position and international cooperation. The research stay included conducting a survey on the positive and negative aspects of China's cultural transformation.



in East Asian studies. As the first academic conference of its kind in Poland and Central Europe, it has gradually become one of the most important venues for academic exchange in the field. In the beginning, it was directed at post-graduate and doctoral students from Polish tertiary institutions. The goal of these meetings was to contribute to creating an important study centre at the University of Łódź, focusing on current East Asian problems. These efforts culminated in 2012, when, for the first time, it was possible to invite international speakers as well as renowned specialists to take part in the conference. Henceforth, LEAM has become an important regional forum for cooperation and the exploration of new ideas regarding East Asia.

Since 2013, the Department of Asian Studies has been publishing volumes in the Contemporary Asian Studies Series (CASS), under the auspices of the University of Łódź Press. CASS had published a dozen of books, in Polish and English, including thematic monographs, and edited volumes on conferences to which LEAM participants (including Chinese scholars) have submitted papers.

## **5. Centre for Asian Affairs: Addressing the Issue of Developing Asian-Polish Interactions**

Established in 2015, the Centre for Asian Affairs is a university-based think-tank chaired by Professor Dominik Mierzejewski. The establishment of the Centre for Asian Affairs is closely tied to the ever-increasing economic, political and cultural importance of East Asian countries, especially China, and the need to observe and monitor evolving processes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). To this end, CAA publishes monthly reports and commentaries on China, Japan and the Republic of Korea activities in CEE, as well as China and the Balkans, and China and the ASEAN. It also publishes analyses of Sino-German relations and domestic developments in China. CAA provides expertise and fulfills advisory and consultant objectives, at both local and central government level. In 2018, a team of CAA scholars conducted two research projects, focusing on China's relations with CEE countries and the CEE subnational diplomacy towards Chinese regional authorities, which resulted in the publishing of two reports. In late 2019, CCA received a research grant from Poland's National Centre for Science to investigate China's policies in the Developing World, including selected case studies of Central and



Eastern Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America (Centre for Asian Affairs, 2022).

Apart from its research activities, since 2017 the CAA has been organising a summer school for Chinese students, the first of its kind in Poland (ScienceinPoland, 2018). Themed as “Understanding Poland: Economy, Society and Science,” it acknowledges the importance of local-level relations between Łódź and cities and regions in China. With financial support from public institutions (Łódź Marshal’s Office and the Special Economic Zone) and private ones (Hatrans logistics company), the University of Łódź offers an interdisciplinary summer programme dedicated to students from Chinese universities. The objective of the two-week summer school is to provide students from China with a better understanding and knowledge of the situation in Poland from historical, economic and sociological perspectives. Special attention is paid to introducing the history of Łódź itself, an industrial city where students from China generally stay during their time at the summer school. To this end, the school offers special courses on the post-industrial heritage of the city of Łódź, with its revitalisation projects including the New City Centre and a special workshop in the Museum of Modern Art. Since its inauguration in 2017, the summer school has been held thrice, attracting 525 students from 17 universities from the People’s Republic of China.<sup>8</sup> However, the COVID-19 pandemic hampered the mobility of Chinese students, and the last edition of the Summer School by far took place in 2019.

## **6. Cooperation with Chinese Educational Institutions: Main Agreements, Limitations, and Prospects**

By 2018, the University of Łódź had more than 20 partnership agreements with counterparts from all over China, including Nankai University, Sichuan University, Henan University and Beijing Foreign Studies University (International Students Office of the UŁ, 2019). Based on the experience of the Polish higher-education institutions (including

8 These include Guilin University, Sichuan University, Zhengzhou University, Jinan University, Nankai University, Tianjin University of Science & Technology, Graduate School of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Inner Mongolia University, University of Macau, Shanghai Lixin University of Accounting and Finance, Beijing International Studies University, Shenzhen University and Hezhou University.

UŁ) in undertaking cooperation with Chinese counterparts, it should be noted that the Polish side prefers direct institutional contacts rather than via private agencies, especially in the field of student recruitment services. This is because, in many instances, the initial agreements signed with the help of recruiting intermediaries are not further confirmed by the administrations of the relevant Chinese universities.

Although the Chinese account for the biggest group of international students globally, only a relatively small number come to Poland. In the academic year 2016/2017, the highest number of all Chinese students at Polish universities (953) were enrolled at the University of Łódź (99) (Siwińska, 2017). This is mostly due to UŁ's flagship cooperation project with higher education institutions in Henan Province, where it has already signed agreements with Henan University, Zhengzhou University, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautical Industry Management, Zhengzhou Institute of Light Industry and Huanghuai University (Kronika Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2015). Based on these agreements, UŁ cooperates with Henan universities in various forms, including the "1 + 3" and "2 + 2" student transfer programmes, short-term student exchanges, visiting fellows, and so on.

The University of Łódź, in partnership with Zhengzhou University, conducts a joint study programme in economics, in the "2 + 2" format approved by China's Ministry of Education in 2013. It is the first such Sino-Polish educational project to gain such approval. Under the programme, the students of partner universities in China (Zhengzhou University, Henan University of Technology, Zhengzhou Institute of Aeronautics, and Cangzhou Vocational College) study at their home university for the first two years, completing the subjects equivalent to the first-year programme of economics at the Faculty of Economics and Sociology (FES) at the University of Łódź. Afterward, they can come to Poland and continue their studies for the next two years (mostly in economics, but also in computer science and business management). Moreover, each semester two lecturers from FES teach two-month courses in economics at Zhengzhou University. This programme is workable due to the difference in the required years of study in China and Poland (BA studies last for four years in China, but only three in Poland). The study programme delivered in English combines two years at Zhengzhou University with a subsequent two years at UŁ. Thus, it enables students to earn a double degree in economics from the two partner institutions (International Students Office of the UŁ, 2013). The admission of Chinese students to

the UŁ part of programme is preceded by a two-month summer intensive English language course in Łódź, as Chinese students encounter some language obstacles when meeting the requirements of courses taught in English.

On the other hand, the limited interest of Polish students in “2 + 2” is, to a large extent, also related to the relatively narrow offer of courses taught in English provided by the Chinese partnership universities. The two-year period of studying in Poland offers Chinese students the opportunity to participate in six-month ERASMUS+ programmes in other European countries and in summer schools co-organised by the Faculty of Sociology and Economics in Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico.

Furthermore, UŁ authorities signed three general agreements in 2011, with universities from Tianjin (Łódź’s sister city since 1994). The three partner universities are Tianjin University of Technology (TUT), Tianjin University of Science and Technology (TUST), and Tianjin University of Technology and Education (TUTE). The main goal of the agreements is to create mutual programmes with partner universities, all of which accepted the initial idea of the cooperation, involving an exchange of students and academic staff, collaborative research, lectures and symposia, and an exchange of scholars and researchers. Cooperation with Tianjin-based universities also covers Nankai University (including political science at the Zhou Enlai School of Government, a unit specialising in China’s local governments activities). Nankai University invited UŁ into the International Forum of Public Universities (IFBU), whose 12<sup>th</sup> annual general meeting was hosted by UŁ in November 2018 (International Students Office of the University of Łódź, 2018). Regarding UŁ’s cooperation with China through IFBU, the most promising field for future joint projects is ecohydrology, which is to be carried out by the European Regional Centre for Ecohydrology (ERCE) under the auspices of UNESCO and the University of Łódź.

In addition, in June 2018 a new funding opportunity for Polish-Chinese research projects was announced. This was the SHENG 1 programme, co-organised by the Polish National Science Centre (NCN) and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). The programme aims to support research projects in all fields of the natural, engineering, life and management sciences, with only psychology and theoretical sociology eligible from the social sciences (NCN, 2019). UŁ has submitted five proposals to SHENG for joint research projects with Chinese partners, however, none of them was qualified for funding in the first edition of the programme.

Finally, UŁ and Sichuan University have collaborated in recent years within the broader framework of Łódź's cooperation with Sichuan province and Chengdu City. In December 2016, a delegation from Sichuan University, led by vice-rector Yan Shijing, visited the University of Łódź to discuss educational cooperation with UŁ's vice-rector Professor Paweł Starosta and representatives of most UŁ departments engaged in cooperation with China (International Relations Office of the UŁ, 2016). During the visit, the Sichuan University delegation was also received by Witold Stępień, the then marshal of Łódź region. During both meetings, plans for future joint activities were discussed, including student and scholarly exchanges, as well as entrepreneurial collaborations that have so far failed to meet the expectations of the Polish side. As Stępień emphasised, the region would like to be perceived not only as a logistics stopover for Chinese trains, but also as a destination for investments and educational cooperation. He said: "Given the size of the Chinese population, for every Polish student in China, there should be 50 Chinese students at our universities" (Marshal's Office of the Łódź Region, 2016).

In May 2017, to enhance the cooperation, a Sichuan University–Łódź round-table event was organised in Chengdu. The Polish side was represented by regional and university authorities, including Łódź City vice-president Krzysztof Piątkowski and UŁ Rector Professor Antoni Różalski (Sichuan University, 2017). A month later, scholars representing the Centre for European Studies and the Institute of Economics of Sichuan University (Professor Lu Zheng, Professor Shi Jian, Professor Yi Dan and Professor Li Zhiyu) took part in the LEAM Conference (European Studies Centre of Sichuan University, 2017). In October 2019 president of Łódź Hanna Zdanowska visited Chengdu and met with Mayor Luo Qiang to discuss cooperation in logistics, investments and education. However, these high-level visits have not yet translated into a substantial increase in educational cooperation. At the higher education level, the most noteworthy is the fact that SFPS teaching staff member Marta Ułańska, PhD, has been lecturing in the Polish Philology Department, which opened at Sichuan University in 2017. The Foreign Relations Office of Sichuan Province also invited a group of young people from Łódź to take part in the First International Summer School, themed "Imagine Sichuan" (Marshal's Office of the Łódź Region, 2017). In addition to university contacts, the cooperation agreement with Sichuan partners on teaching the Chinese language at Primary School No. 1 and High School XXVI in Łódź was also put into effect, and Polish language is taught at one of the primary schools in Chengdu's Qingbaijiang district.

## 7. Conclusions: Cooperation that Needs Greater Substance

Seven decades of University of Łódź cooperation with the People's Republic of China show that the intensity of contacts has often depended on fluctuations in the political relations between the two countries. In this respect, one may assume that the development of further cooperation will also be affected by the ups and downs of Sino-Polish relations at the central level. Although collaboration among UŁ and Chinese higher education and research institutions has brought considerable effects, it still offers a lot of untapped educational potential and research space to be filled. The central educational project which is working effectively is “2 + 2,” carried out with UŁ's partner institutions in Henan. However, institutionalised research cooperation in certain fields has limitations, primarily concerning subjects considered by the Chinese authorities to be politically sensitive, such as history, political science, international relations, and so on. At the institutional level on the Chinese side, the Ministry of Science and Technology bears the ultimate decision for international projects, giving preference to the field of science over social science (excluding economy) and humanities.

The “bottom-up” experience of Łódź-Sino relations illustrates how local-level commercial activities can translate into institutionalization of regional cooperation and, to some extent, can pave the way for bilateral collaboration between the central authorities, including in the area of educational interaction. However, the subsequent deterioration of contacts between Poland and China taking place since late 2016 has also affected cooperation on the local level, including the plans for transforming Łódź into a major Central European logistic hub with a Chinese investor (Kowalski, 2021, pp. 204–206), demonstrating that the local-central nexus is a two-way street. Moreover, despite the initial enthusiasm, academic cooperation is seemingly heading on more realistic tracks. Therefore, following the slowdown of interactions in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the more tangible results of the efforts made to improve the academic cooperation in the past years remain to be seen.

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