

MANAGING COOPERATION PROGRAMS BETWEEN SERBIA AND CHINA IN THE FIELD OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

For many decades Serbia and China have had a very friendly and supporting relationship filled with most importantly good political and cultural relations. The changes on Chinese domestic market, and global international changes in relations between Serbia and China have also been very positive.

Strategic partnership agreement that China signed with Serbia in 2009 was the turning point in their relations. Economic cooperation started to boom and today China is investing heavily in Serbian infrastructure, and is also supporting some other projects regarding education, technology and culture.

The aim of this paper is to describe the development of all relations between Serbia and China, to explain current situation, and to specially analyze cooperation programs that we have had in recent years. The focus will be on education, higher education in particular, and the cooperation between the two countries.

As a special case study the authors of this paper will present the work results of Chinese Center as a part of John Naisbitt University. The Chinese Center will be used as an example to show which cooperation programs this unit is conducting, and in what ways they are managed.

Keywords: *management, cooperation, higher education, Serbia, China, Chinese Center, John Naisbitt University*

1. INTRODUCTION

From 2009 the overall relations between Serbia and China became more important and intense. This is the year when the Governments of the two countries signed an agreement to become each other's strategic partners. At that time, Serbia was the fifth country with which China signed strategic partnership agreement – together with Russia, Brazil, USA and South Africa. After that year the process of mutual cooperation went on rapidly in a good direction.

Although this strategic partnership was mainly in the field of economy and politics, it also had notes about cooperation in the fields of culture, education and technology.

The aim of this paper is to show how this cooperation started, what the initiatives were at the beginning and what they are now. It will focus on the start of the cooperation process, the development and the results at this moment, especially regarding education.

The first part of this paper will be dedicated to the explanation of the cooperation of these two countries in the field of economy and politics. The second part of the paper is about the cooperation in the field of education, more specifically higher education. The final part will show how this cooperation programs are managed at John Naisbitt University, within the Chinese Center.

Since China is heavily investing in Serbian education, the authors of this paper thought that it was very important to stress out the outcome of this process of mutual cooperation in the field of higher education, and to explain how good relations in this area can benefit in all the aspects of joint collaboration.

2. ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL COOPERATION BETWEEN SERBIA AND CHINA

Relations between Peoples Republic of China and former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (whose part was Serbia) started in 1949, and at that time Yugoslavia recognized China as a sovereign country. Still, it was only a few years later - in 1955 that the official collaboration was established. The two countries exchanged diplomatic notes in that year, between two Foreign Ministers, and good relations have continued for many decades, until the disintegration of Yugoslavia.

After that period, The Republic of Serbia, as a sovereign country, established good relations with China, and especially in political sense these good relations were confirmed throughout Chinese intentions to have Taiwan under its sovereignty, and Serbia supported the efforts. On the other hand, China supported Serbia in its efforts to have Kosovo as an integral part of its country, and even to this day China did not recognize Kosovo as a sovereign country. Also, Chinese Embassy in Serbia was bombed in 1999, and three people were killed. Serbian people never forgot that, nor has this tragic event ruined the mutual cooperation.

Although Serbia had very good relations with China in different parts of its historical development, it can be said that after the year 2000 it started to progress, first of all with the mutual visits of high ranked country officials, and then with diplomatic statements that supported previous negotiations. Then in 2009 there was obvious evidence that both countries realized that they could improve their relations, and they signed strategic partnership agreement. This agreement was signed by Presidents at that time - Hu and Tadić, and the agreement states the following (1):

1. both countries defined their political connections and cooperation – especially the issues regarding Taiwan and Kosovo;
2. they also made agreement regarding economic and trading relations, and gave support to deepen the collaboration in the field of building infrastructural projects (such as bridges, power plants, roads), fields of communication, petrochemical industry, high technology, industrial production and food industry;

3. China and Serbia will support and focus even more on deepening the cooperation in the field of culture, education, science and technology, police and military activity, and finally they will establish the collaboration in the field of tourism, civil aviation, health care and entertainment.

During his visit to China, Serbian President Tadić made an agreement with Chinese Government to start new relations by building a bridge on the river Danube together. That bridge "Mihajlo Pupin" was finally finished in 2014, and officially put in use on December 18th 2014, during the 16+1 Summit in Belgrade. The bridge was built by China Road and Bridge Company with the help of domestic companies, and its total value together with all the connecting roads amounted \$260 million. Chinese Exim Bank financed this bridge by 85%, and the rest of it was funded by the Republic of Serbia and the city of Belgrade. (2)

That year and the agreement marked the first major step in the joint efforts to pursue better connections between these two countries and it demonstrated Chinese decision to promote Serbia as its main strategic partner in Central and Eastern Europe.

2.1 Economic data

Peoples Republic of China has been the most important foreign trade and financial partner of Serbia in the East Asia region (3). In the 2014 report of Serbian Chamber of Commerce, out of 165 countries to which Serbia exports its goods, PRC is on 50th place.¹¹¹ On the other hand, PRC is the 4th country from which Serbia imports goods (after Italy, Germany and Russia), out of 202 countries. In aggregate export of Serbia, China participated with 0.1%, and in aggregate import with 8.3%.

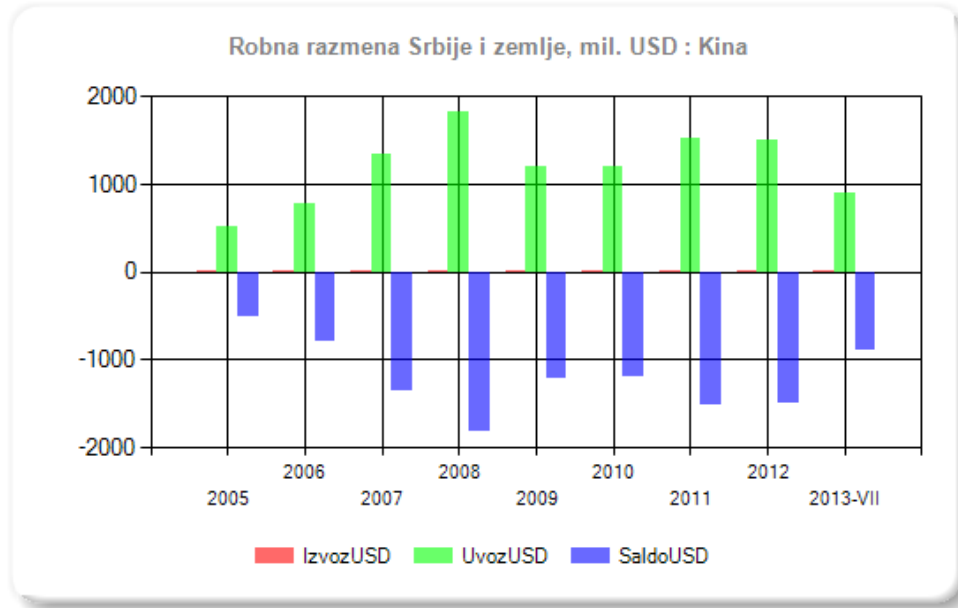
The first graph shows the trade exchange between Serbia and China in millions of US \$, starting from 2006 to the 2013 (red shows Serbian export to China, while green is Chinese export to Serbia, and purple is balance in millions of US \$).

The latest data also shows us that Serbia improved its export to China in 2014 compared to 2013. In 2014 Serbian export was \$ 14.4 million compared to \$9.2 million in 2013. At the same time Chinese export to Serbia also increased – it was \$1.7 billion in 2014 and \$1.6 billion in 2013.

Statistic models that Serbia uses to calculate the import from PRC by taking into account all the goods that are produced in China, nevertheless are this real Chinese goods produced by Chinese companies, or produced by different types of MNC not originally from China. If we take into account only goods that are originally produced and exported by PRC, the export value is significantly lower, approximately 50% smaller.

¹¹¹ Note: All the data in this 2.1 chapter will be given according to the data that can be found on the web site of Serbian Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.pks.rs/MSaradnja.aspx?id=73&p=1&pp=2&>

Graph 1- Trade exchange between Serbia and China in millions of US \$



Source: <http://www.pks.rs/MSaradnja.aspx?id=73&p=1&pp=2&>

Graph 2 shows the data on the coverage of import by export is (net export index). The numbers suggest that the situation is currently improving, having in mind that in 2014, 0.64% import was covered by export, and in 2011 for example it was only 0.19%.

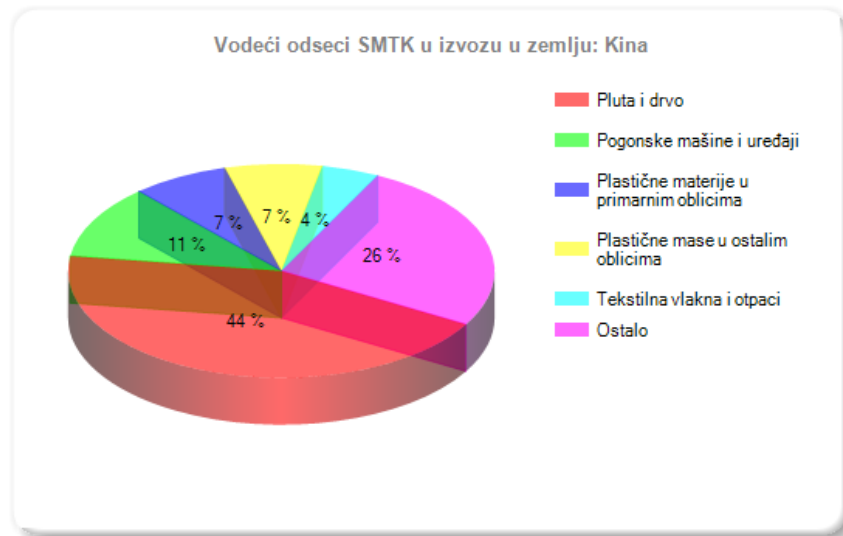
Graph 2- Net export index: Serbia and China



Source: <http://www.pks.rs/MSaradnja.aspx?id=73&p=1&pp=2&>

Graph three points out the main group of products that Serbia exports to China: cork and wood account for 44%, all sorts of different finished products 26%, machines and transportation vehicles 11%, plastic materials 7% while textile accounts for 4%.

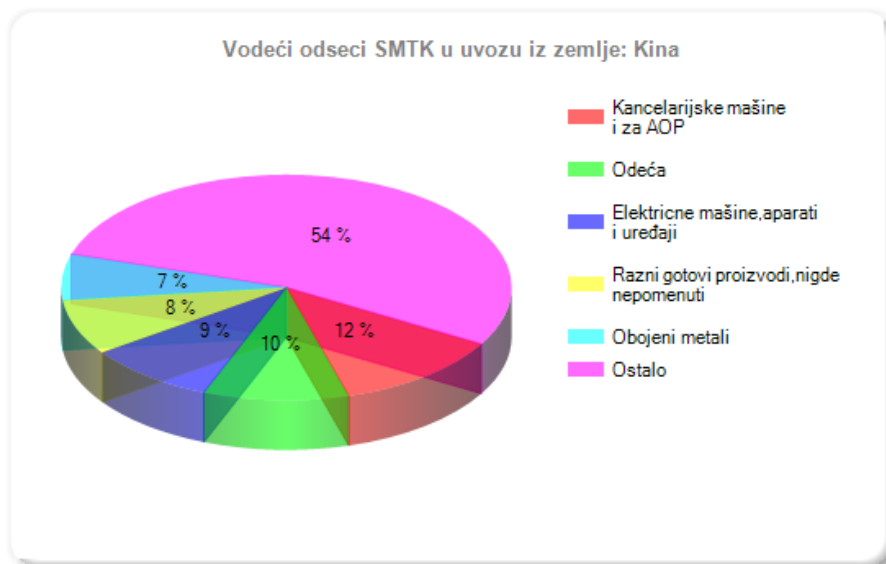
Graph 3 - Main groups of goods by Standard International Trade Classification (SITC) - in the share of exports in country: China



Source: <http://www.pks.rs/MSaradnja.aspx?id=73&p=1&pp=2&>

Graph 4 shows a list of products (in percentage) that Serbia imports from China: 12% office supplies and devices, 10% clothes, 9% electrical machines and devices, 7% non-ferrous metals.

Graph 4 - Main groups of goods (SITC) - in the share of import from country: China



Source: <http://www.pks.rs/MSaradnja.aspx?id=73&p=1&pp=2&>

Summarizing all the above mentioned we can conclude that Serbia has a large trade deficit with China, which can be expected, having in mind the gap in the size of the countries, population, GDP etc. Serbia still exports the goods that have a low degree of processing to China and it still has not found the goods that can satisfy some market niches in China with goods that have a high level of processing and a good market price for Chinese customers.

On the other hand, China exports the goods with higher level of processing, and even if we exclude the goods that Serbia imports from China coming from foreign MNC, still there are a lot of products that are made in China by Chinese companies, which make a lot of profit from Serbian customers, mainly in the field of computers, mobile phones, furniture and textile.

2.2 Serbia as an integral part of Chinese economic initiatives – Summit 16+1 and New Silk Road

So far, Serbia and China have had six years of constant and prosperous relations. Serbia has been a supportive partner of China on both international initiatives that China is promoting right now - New Silk Road and Summit 16+1.

One Belt – One Road (so called New Silk Road) initiative is a project to better connect China with countries in Europe, Asia and Africa by building roads, railways, infrastructure such as ports that can save the time needed for transportation of goods, and thus help lower the transportation costs.

Summit 16+1 under which China is making plans with 16 countries from Central and Eastern Europe tends to improve the relations not only in the field of economy, but also in the field of infrastructure, tourism, technology, culture and education. In a sense this summit is a smaller version of One Belt – One Road initiative, with more versatile program. The New Silk Road initiative is mainly focused on road and railroad infrastructure, while 16+1 is more broadly oriented.

Serbia is particularly interested in the 16+1 Summit, and this is the reason why Serbia was the host of the annual meeting of Prime Ministers from Central and Eastern Europe and China in 2014.

At this meeting, Serbia signed 13 agreements and memorandums with China. (4) The agreements included the following:

1. Economic and technical cooperation,
2. Air traffic
3. Approving the loan for the second stage of the thermal plant in Kostolac B project,
4. Opening cultural centers in the other country,
5. Building high speed railway between Serbia and Hungary.

Memorandums were signed for:

1. Financial cooperation between these countries;
2. Starting a feasibility study on the construction of an industrial park;

3. Cooperation on a project referring to a part of the ring road around Belgrade, Bubanj potok and Vinča;
4. Financing infrastructural projects in Serbia;
5. Protocol on health standards for exporting Serbian meat to China.

So this Summit had excellent results regarding the agreements, and after that some projects such as building the high-speed railway and building the Kostolac B thermal plant have started. Various meetings in both countries regarding the beginning of other projects (e.g. industrial parks and steel factory Železara Smederevo) and their funding have been held.¹¹²

At a business conference that was held in January 2016 at Serbian Chamber of Commerce, state officials said that right now the value of the current and future projects with Chinese investments amounts €3.5 billion. (5) Most of this money goes to transportation, infrastructure and energetics.

In February 2016 (6), Chinese President Xi Jinping gave an official statement in which he particularly pointed out the intensified cooperation between China and Serbia in recent years, and that countries were deepening strategic relations in line with the mutual fundamental interests. Xi also said that he: "observes that the strategic partnership between the Peoples Republic of China and the Republic of Serbia is continuously deepening and cooperation expanding in all areas." Also, Chinese officials confirmed that Xi's accepted the invitation from Serbian President to visit Belgrade in 2016, and that is usually a sign for improving bilateral relations even more.

3. COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF PRIMARY AND HIGHER EDUCATION

One part of strategic partnership agreement between Serbia and China had references to the cooperation in the field of education. That part of partnership together with building the bridge over the river Danube was carried out very quickly. In August the agreement for partnership was signed and only five months later the first agreement regarding education was signed in Beijing by current Ministers of education. (7) That document shows that the two countries encouraged cooperation on the level of high schools, but most importantly on the level of graduate schools and universities. Also, special attention was dedicated to improvement of the work of Confucius Institute in Belgrade, improvement of studies of Serbian language at Beijing Foreign Studies University and there were talks about the increase in number of scholarships for Serbian students in China.

The turning point in this cooperation was the year 2011 in which Serbian Ministry of Education together Chinese Ministry of Education started a pilot project for learning Chinese language in

¹¹² Note: Thanks to these projects, several important companies from China such as: ZTE, Huawei, China Road and Bridge Company, Sinohydro, Shandong high speed company, CMEC – hydro plants, China International Water and Electric Corporation, Belmax are currently operating in Serbia– whole sale of Chinese products and China Development Bank.

Serbian primary and high schools. Chinese government together with Hanban¹¹³ sponsored Chinese language teachers to come to Serbia, and teach Serbian pupils Chinese language. The cost of their stay in Serbia – accommodation, health insurance and transportation were paid by Serbia and all other costs were paid by Hanban.

There are about 70 primary schools, high schools and professional high schools (such as Philological gymnasium, Gymnasium in Sremski Karlovci and Mathematical gymnasium) where pupils learn Chinese language. Cities like Niš, Leskovac, Beograd, Užice, Knjaževac, Rača, Podgorac, Novi Sad, Nova Varoš, Vlasotince, Knjaževac, Sokobanja, Boljevci, Lebane, Smederevska Palanka, Paraćin, Despotovac, Rgotina, Medveđa and some smaller towns that have already started Chinese language courses. According to the reports in Serbian newspapers, approximately 2,500 Serbian pupils attended those classes last year.

The situation is also improving rapidly at university level. There are more and more universities that offer Chinese language courses. In Serbia there are two Confucius Institutes- one in Belgrade and one in Novi Sad. Two private universities in Serbia have Chinese language courses that are integrated in school official programs, including John Naisbitt University. They also offer other types of Chinese language courses that are open to both students and public.

Chinese Ministry of Education gave 67 scholarships to students from 2009 to 2015. These scholarships are diverse, so students can apply either for scholarships to improve their knowledge of Chinese language, or master's or PhD studies. Students can attend master's or PhD studies in Chinese or in English language-whichever they prefer. These scholarships cover full tuition fees, books, health insurance and monthly wages for students. This means that China spends approximately between €10,000 and 20,000 for master's or PhD studies that last for minimum two or four years, on one student, depending on the type of scholarship, university that they attend and the number of the years that students stay in China. The students only pay for international airplane ticket, and expenses that they have for applying for scholarship such as medical examination that is issued by national health organization, validation of student's diploma (e.g. transcript in English language) and sometimes visa expenses.

Last year Chinese Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM) started giving the scholarships for the same type of university programs that Ministry of education does, but these scholarships are even more expensive, and they allow students under the age of 45 to apply, while the previous one was restricted to students under the age of 30.

Unfortunately, at this moment we cannot determine the exact number of Serbian students that were or are currently studying in China, because we don't know how many of them won the scholarships

¹¹³ Hanban is a colloquial abbreviation for the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language. It is governed by the Office of Chinese Language Council International affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. In general, Hanban is responsible for spreading knowledge and interest for the Chinese language and culture in nations around the world that are not native speakers of Chinese.

from some Chinese universities. We can only see on some Universities web sites or in some newspapers that there are such students, so we suppose that the number is even bigger.

There are about 10 professors who received this kind of scholarships (starting from 2009) through the Ministry of Education. But this is not the only way that professors can apply for them. They can apply for different kind of specialist courses that aim to help improve scientific and academics knowledge about some parts of Chinese culture, history, tradition, economy, technology, engineering... Such courses are organized by Chinese Ministry of Commerce or Chinese Ministry of Culture. Each year they give several scholarships, so the number of professors that have been to China is certainly much bigger.

One of the goals of strategic partnership agreement between Serbia and China is to improve the mobility of students and professors among these two countries. It means that in the future there will be more agreements between Chinese and Serbian Universities that will guarantee more exchange programs among these countries.

In the field of higher education Serbia has already established joint research projects that were co-funded by Serbia and China, for the period between 1st July 2013 and 1st July 2015. (8) Next public call for projects was announced in the third quarter of 2014 (for the co-financing scientific and technological cooperation) for the period between 2015 and 2016.¹¹⁴

In December 2015 our Government signed 13 new memorandums with Chinese Government in Beijing, and among them there was one about the cooperation between Serbian Ministry of Science and Technology and Chinese Ministry of Education. This memo is about scientific cooperation in the field of joint review (Serbian and Chinese) of scientific projects that Serbian scientist will apply for grants for the next cycle of Serbian national scientific project round.

¹¹⁴ Ministry of Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia official call: "The subject of the competition is co-financing the mutual visits of researchers (the cost of travel and accommodation) to be implemented within the project activities of bilateral scientific and technological cooperation. The competition is reported to researchers and teams of researchers who are employed in scientific research organizations that are eligible in accordance with the Law on Scientific Research. Preference is given to proposals of bilateral projects which are based on scientific research projects funded by the Ministry of Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia, which are in line with the Strategy of Scientific and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia from 2010 to 2015, or which are funded by international source (e.g. the Horizon 2020 program and other international and regional organizations) and project developers have not participated in the previous project cycles with the People's Republic of China."

4. CASE STUDY: CHINESE CENTER AT JOHN NAISBITT UNIVERSITY

Chinese Center as part of "John Naisbitt" University was established in October 2012 in cooperation with Chinese Embassy in Republic of Serbia. The purpose of establishing the Chinese Center was and still is the improvement of academic, cultural and political-economic cooperation between two countries that have had strong friendship for many decades.

Chinese Center, as an integral part of John Naisbitt University which follows modern business trends, has a clearly defined mission, vision and goals:

MISSION

To improve the cooperation between Serbia and China through its work, especially in academic and business areas, by informing and educating all who show interest in studying about China and Serbia.

VISION

The principal vision of the Chinese Centre is to become a recognizable brand in Serbian market, and in the future on Chinese market as well, and to cooperate with all those who are interested in the improvement of cooperation between Serbia and China to their mutual benefit.

GOALS

The major goals of the Chinese Center are the following:

1. Promotion of Chinese culture, history, tradition and language
2. Promotion of Serbian culture, history, tradition and language
3. Improvement of the cooperation between "John Naisbitt" University and Chinese universities and strengthening academic cooperation
4. Enhancement of Chinese-Serbian relations in all social fields.

The first activity of CC was organizing Chinese language courses. Professors from both Serbia and China were teaching students at Chinese Center. More than 500 students were and are still attending different courses of Chinese language (from beginners to advanced level). In addition to the knowledge of the Chinese language, they have also gained the knowledge about Chinese culture, history and tradition. The course is open not only to university students, but to all citizens of Belgrade. The students are required to be older than 19.

With the help of Chinese Embassy in Serbia CC established a library that is fully equipped with books necessary to learn Chinese language from beginners to advanced level.

A month ago CC launched a new web site in order to provide information primarily to interested students, but also to promote different aspects of China. ([10http://chinesecenter.nezbit.edu.rs/](http://chinesecenter.nezbit.edu.rs/)) Full media coverage of all the things that the Chinese Center does is available on the web site, and there is a blog where they write university students about their experience studying in China or Serbia.

Those are the students who have obtained different scholarships from Chinese Embassy here in Serbia or from Chinese universities.

CC also organizes different types of courses such as: Chinese Economy and Management Practice (Doing business in China). In order to promote the cooperation between these two countries Chinese Center organized different manifestations such as:

- First Chinese higher education fair in Serbia in 2013. During that fair 13 universities from China presented the programs of their bachelor, master's and PhD studies to the interested students from Serbia (<http://chinesecenter.nezbit.edu.rs/2016/03/na-megatrendu-odrzan-prvi-sajam-kineskog-visokog-obrazovanja-u-srbiji/>);
- Celebrations of Spring Festival (2014, 2015 and 2016), with the participation of students, but also with guests from different primary schools, famous Serbian artists and Wing Chun performance. Also, his Excellency Mr. Li Manchang attended this year celebration, and spoke about Chinese Center, and its work not only with Serbian, but with Chinese students as well;
- CC founded Sinology club and organized round table conference "Challenges of Sinology in Serbia" (11)
- CC organized lectures to eminent scientist and experts coming from China at JN University.

Besides this, one of the main goals of CC was specialization of professors and students in China. Up until now three professors have obtained the scholarships for specialist studies in China. As for students, 13 of them went to study in China – half or full year of studying Chinese language, summer schools or master's studies. Currently, 4 students are studying in China, three of them are on their master's studies and one student is learning Chinese language for one year.

This year Chinese Center is a place where nine Chinese students are learning Serbian language, about Serbian culture, history tradition, economy, business practices here, and our relations with China. These students are from Hebei University of Foreign Studies, and they will be volunteers at the next Summit 16+1 this year in China. Some of the courses that they have are in Chinese and some of them are in English.

In the end, it is important to point out that although John Naisbitt University does not have a faculty of philology, it included Chinese language as one of the languages that can be studied at the Faculty of Culture and Media and Faculty of International Economics, so it means that the students can study Chinese language at their faculty and get grades in their student notebooks (index).

Managing different kind of programs and initiatives involves careful planning and decision making. CC has a lot of contacts among Serbian academic, politic and economic professionals and a lot of people from Chinese Embassy, Chinese Universities and Chinese business people. They are all very interested in making progress and starting new projects. This implies consideration of many elements to see if these initiatives are something that CC can manage and in what way. So the priorities are determined on annual basis and if there is a need revised on half-year level. So having in mind that CC has just celebrated its third year of work, it can be said that in the previous

years the results were good, but they should be even better in upcoming years, because Chinese people value long term cooperation.

5. CONCLUSION

Cooperation projects in the field of higher education between Serbia and China have never been so successful and so rapid. Each and every day there are new initiatives and new ideas. There is willingness from both Governments to improve all bilateral relations and education is one among them.

Because of that we have many chances as a country to use the opportunities in the field of education, and especially in the field of higher education. This is very significant for Serbian higher education system, since our total budget for education is about less than 4% of GDP, and for higher education less than 1% (data from 2013), which means that we do need help.

By giving Serbia so much support in the field of education, China is helping our country to lessen the extent to which our tough economic situation affects the scientific work. First of all Serbian students are given the opportunity to study abroad, to improve their knowledge of at least two languages (Chinese and English), they have a chance to study at best Chinese universities and they have the opportunity to connect with professors and students all over the world and explore international scientific work and relations. On the other hand, Serbian professors and scientist can expand their scientific network, improve their scientific work and not only help themselves but also their university to become even more important on international scientific level.

What is also very important is managing this kind cooperation in the best possible way. Serbia as a country has had so many political and economic difficulties in past 20 years, and education suffered because of that quite a lot. So when we have such opportunities to improve our education system at all levels, we need to utilize this privilege in every possible way and use them wisely. Promotion and selection of the candidates that will represent our country on every level must be careful and their work needs to provide good results. Otherwise these chances that we had and still have will be useless.

Since Serbia has historically been more connected with Europe and we have more scientific work and cooperation with those countries, this is a very good moment to broaden our research about Asia, and especially China. Projects like Summit 16+1 and New Silk Road will give us a chance to explore Asia more closely as a region with which we can have more close relations in every sense.

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