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LOOKING EAST: INTEREST IN CHINESE AND AMERICAN UNIVERSITIES IN RUSSIAN-LANGUAGE WIKIPEDIA, 2016-2025

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Abstract: Where do Russian-speaking readers look when they think about leading universities abroad? This study uses the number of views of Wikipedia articles as a measure of interest in five leading Chinese and five leading American universities, in Russian and, for comparison, in English, from 2016 to 2025. In Russian, views of the Chinese universities grew by 38% while views of the American universities fell by 29%, and the American lead narrowed from 21.4 to 11.0 times. Part of the American decline reflects the fall of Russian Wikipedia as a whole (−19%), and in English the American universities lost views mainly in 2025. The growth of the Chinese universities in Russian came after 2021: their views fell by 17% in 2016-2021, reaching their lowest level in 2020-2021, and rose by 65% in 2021-2025, a pattern not seen in English Wikipedia. Tsinghua University grew the most (+84%). The results are consistent with the author's suggestion that the change is linked to closer ties between Russia and China after 2022, but cannot show its cause.

Keywords: university choice, China, United States, Wikipedia page views, public attention, international students

1. Introduction

A student from Kazakhstan who wants to study abroad can look to the United States and Europe, but also to China. How interest in Chinese universities has changed compared with American ones is hard to measure directly, but there is a practical proxy: the number of times people open a Wikipedia article about a topic. Wikipedia page views have been used to measure public interest and even to predict the box office success of films before their release [1].

This study compares the views of articles about leading Chinese and American universities in Russian-language Wikipedia, written in a language widely used in Kazakhstan, between 2016 and 2025, and checks whether the changes are specific to Russian-speaking readers by comparing them with English Wikipedia.

2. Hypothesis

When the topic was proposed to her, the mentor's message already mentioned that the Russian article about Tsinghua University was opened about 12 thousand times in 2016 and 21 thousand times in 2025, and the article about Harvard about 327 and 225 thousand times. Before the full data were collected, the author wrote (16 October 2026): "I think that since 2016 interest in Tsinghua University has grown the most, because China is actively developing in technology and education and its universities are becoming more and more famous in the world. At the same time,

Harvard may have been viewed less often because of the high cost of study and the difficulty of admission and getting a visa. I think more and more students have started to see Chinese universities as a good alternative to American ones" (original in Russian). Because she knew these two figures, her expectation about Tsinghua and Harvard is treated here as a starting point, not as a test.

3. Data and methods

Monthly numbers of page views by users (excluding automated traffic) were downloaded from the Wikimedia pageviews service [2] on 2026-10-30 for January 2016 to December 2025, for the Russian and English articles about five Chinese universities (Tsinghua, Peking, Fudan, Shanghai Jiao Tong and Zhejiang) and five American universities (Harvard, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Columbia, Stanford and Yale), and for the total views of each language edition. The Russian article about Shanghai Jiao Tong University was renamed in 2024, so the views of its old title («Шанхайский университет транспорта») and its new title («Шанхайский университет Цзяотун») were added together; the other titles have continuous series. Views were summed by year and by group, and also expressed per million views of the whole language edition, to remove the effect of changes in its overall traffic. To see whether the trend changed, 2016-2021 and 2021-2025 were compared; this split was chosen after the yearly figures had been seen, so other windows are also reported. Kazakh Wikipedia could not be used: of the Chinese universities, only Zhejiang has an article in Kazakh, while all five American universities do.

4. Results

4.1. Chinese against American universities

In Russian Wikipedia the five Chinese universities were viewed 39,857 times in 2016 and 54,852 times in 2025, while the five American universities fell from 852,811 to 603,924 (Table 1). The American universities are still read far more, but their lead narrowed from 21.4 times to 11.0 times. Russian Wikipedia as a whole lost 19% of its views over the same period, so per million views of the whole edition the American group fell less, from 74.2 to 64.8 (−13%), while the Chinese group rose from 3.47 to 5.89 (+70%). A large part of the American decline came in a single year: −15% in Russian from 2024 to 2025, when the whole edition lost 12%.

Table 1. Yearly views of the articles about Chinese and American universities in Russian Wikipedia, 2016-2025 [2]

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Chinese universities (5), views	39,857	44,996	47,537	41,276	32,023	33,224	42,857	52,454	53,566	54,852
American universities (5), views	852,811	805,907	714,271	721,687	787,708	741,759	734,745	751,059	710,926	603,924
American to Chinese, times	21.4	17.9	15.0	17.5	24.6	22.3	17.1	14.3	13.3	11.0
Chinese, per million views	3.47	4.08	4.61	4.25	3.32	3.35	3.93	4.86	5.06	5.89
Americ	74.2	73.1	69.2	74.2	81.7	74.9	67.3	69.5	67.2	64.8

an, per million views										

4.2. Each university

Of the Chinese universities, Tsinghua grew the most in Russian Wikipedia: 11,648 views in 2016 and 21,409 in 2025 (+84%), followed by Fudan (+33%), Shanghai Jiao Tong (+30%), Zhejiang (+20%), Peking (+6%). All five American universities lost views in Russian: MIT −38%, Stanford −32%, Harvard −31%, Yale −19%, Columbia −18% (Table 2). In English, the American group was almost unchanged from 2016 to 2024 (+1%) and then fell by 20% in 2025, more than English Wikipedia as a whole (−6%).

Table 2. Views of each university's article in Russian Wikipedia in 2016 and 2025, and change in English Wikipedia, 2016-2025 [2]

University	Russian 2016	Russian 2025	Change, %	English change, %
Tsinghua	11,648	21,409	+84%	+70%
Fudan	6,618	8,828	+33%	+9%
Shanghai Jiao Tong	4,011	5,200	+30%	+6%
Zhejiang	5,150	6,179	+20%	+83%
Peking	12,430	13,236	+6%	+32%
MIT	161,664	100,754	−38%	−28%
Stanford	135,532	91,614	−32%	−32%
Harvard	326,835	224,978	−31%	−8%
Yale	160,312	130,514	−19%	−22%
Columbia	68,468	56,064	−18%	−10%

4.3. When the change happened

The rise of the Chinese universities in Russian Wikipedia is recent. From 2016 to 2021 their combined views fell by 17% (by 4% per million views), and from 2021 to 2025 they rose by 65% (76% per million). All five grew faster after 2021 than before: Tsinghua +12% then +65%, Peking −35% then +63%, Fudan −24% then +76%, Shanghai Jiao Tong +3% then +26%, Zhejiang −42% then +108%. Part of the size of this rise comes from the starting point, because 2020 and 2021 were the lowest years: measured from 2018 the Chinese group rose by 15%, and from 2019 by 33%. In English Wikipedia there was no fall and rise: the same universities grew by 25% in 2016-2021 and by 16% in 2021-2025.

5. Discussion

Among the Chinese universities, interest in Tsinghua grew the most, and Harvard lost interest in Russian Wikipedia, as the author expected, although she already knew these two figures when she wrote her hypothesis. The new information is the wider picture: all five American universities lost interest, part of this loss reflects the fall of Russian Wikipedia as a whole, and in English most of it came in 2025 alone, which may also reflect changes in how Wikipedia is read or counted. The data cannot show whether cost, admission or visas played a role. Chinese universities have become more visible, but they are still read about many times less than American ones, so "an alternative" describes the direction of change better than the present balance.

When she saw that the Chinese universities began to rise only after 2022, the author suggested (25 October 2026) that "after 2022 interest in Chinese universities grew because Russia began to cooperate more with China. Perhaps students began to consider China for study more often instead of Europe and the USA" (original in Russian). The data are consistent with this explanation: the fall and rise appear in Russian Wikipedia and not in English Wikipedia. They cannot show the cause, however, because other events of these years, such as the end of China's COVID-19 border restrictions, fall in the same period, and because the rise is measured from the lowest years of the series.

Limitations. Page views measure attention, not intentions or applications. The Wikimedia service gives views by language, not by country, for single articles, so the results describe Russian-speaking readers in general, not Kazakhstan alone. Views can rise because of news unrelated to

studying, and counting methods may change over time. Only ten universities were compared, and the comparison periods were chosen after the data were seen.

6. Conclusion

Between 2016 and 2025 Russian-speaking readers of Wikipedia looked up the leading Chinese universities more and the leading American ones less, and the American lead fell from about 21 to about 11 times. The rise of the Chinese universities happened after 2021 and appears only in Russian, which points to a change among Russian-speaking readers, while American universities still attract far more attention.

Data availability

The page view data are public [2]. The monthly data and the analysis script are available from the author or her mentoring team on request.

Author contributions and use of AI tools

The author chose the research question from two proposed by her mentor, wrote the expectation quoted in Section 2 and proposed the explanation discussed in Section 5. The data were analysed and the text was drafted by her mentor with the help of a generative AI assistant (Claude, Anthropic). Every number was computed by the analysis script from the Wikimedia data. Before submission, the author checked the results herself: she recalculated by hand the growth of views of the Tsinghua University article in Russian Wikipedia from Table 2 (21,409 / 11,648, about 1.84, or +84%) and it matched the paper.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest. No funding was received for this study.

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