



ARE HUMANITIES STILL RELEVANT?

There is no doubt that the world of the 21st century relies heavily on rapid changes in natural sciences and technology. Many experts and reputable scientists, as well as politicians and businessmen, believe that humanities have passed the peak of their development, have lost their prestige, and, moreover, are in a state of crisis. They have nothing to offer for a generation of young people who are pragmatic, aimed at practical, materially tangible results and go into open spaces of life. Modern employers have well-defined, extremely stringent requirements for their employees, and the literary analysis of Shakespeare's sonnets or the knowledge of the history of Saki barrows is hardly included in the list of these requirements. You can, of course, study the problems of space and time from the cultural or philosophical point of view, existential loneliness in the postmodern literature or ethical systems of the samurai caste, if you do not care about your employment, or there is someone nearby who will take care of your material well-being.

We have to admit it makes sense. But, maybe, these smart people will tell us who will then answer the questions that become urgent every day and for every person – about social justice, legal literacy, environmental concerns, ethics of relationships between extremely different and very vulnerable people? How, without pathos and beautiful phrases, to solve personally and intimately the problem of identity, moral choice in specific situations, difficulties of interaction and mutual understanding with children and with elderly parents? It is here that humanities can play a vital role, providing an opportunity for young minds to discover for themselves a broader and deeper awareness of problems of a man and society and not get lost in this space.

Moreover, humanistic perspectives can and should ensure that human progress and human destiny are taken into account by scientists and practitioners involved in the development of technology, biology, medicine and other sciences of earth and life. Ideally, it is humanistic perspectives and values that should lead heads, leaders, managers, and entrepreneurs, as well as educators and artists. And instruments of humanistic influence, in addition to curricula of humanitarian education, should include concrete social and charitable work. Representatives of the academic community at Oxford University believe that humanities play a crucial role in modern society and are necessary for

a deep understanding of who we are, how we have become who we are, and to really think deeply about how we solve practical, ethical and historical problems in the modern era.

Nevertheless, the number of students of humanities and the number of humanities worldwide are declining. The American Historical Association reports that from 2011 to 2017 the number of awarded historical degrees decreased by more than 30%, and those in philosophy, English and foreign languages – by more than 20%.

Changes in the structure of employment are directly reflected in the education system, in which humanities are perceived as remnants of the past, while business and commercialization dominate forcing students to be “competitive” to adapt as quickly as possible to market conditions.

In 2015, there were reports in the Japanese media about the “restructuring” of humanities at national universities in Japan. The media reported that the Minister of Education had ordered university administrations to abolish humanitarian faculties or transform them into services that better meet the needs of society. Japanese analysts see the reason for such a dismissive attitude in the obsession of universities with global rankings, based on results of research activities and their evaluation, as well as in the absence of obvious “profitability” of humanities for society. Compared to natural sciences, humanities do not have high-impact scientific journals, do not generate high citation rates, and do not attract significant funding for research activities that would allow them to raise the status of a university. Their Western colleagues, along with the already mentioned irrelevance, reproach humanities for their narrow ideological orientation in the fields of literature and language, history, philosophy, religious studies, art, and for the radicalization of humanities, focusing on defeatist and opposition aspects of modern culture. Thus, they believe, humanitarian degree programs prepare protesters and suspicious cynics who oppose the progress of society.

However, not the entire global academic community is so rigid and uncompromising towards humanities. Some researchers believe that humanities in the future will be able to successfully integrate into natural sciences and technology. For example, they will deal with ethical issues in genetic engineering, robotics, and AI, warn society

about dangers threatening humanity, formulate new questions, interpret nuances of human motivation and communication, and develop various cultural perspectives. For example, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology acknowledged that all the problems that engineering has to solve, from climate change to disease and poverty, are related to a person, his behavior, and human realities, so they recommend their students to rely on the knowledge of literature, history, art or music in their studies.

The program of Clemson University (South Carolina) includes a series of disciplines under the general name “Political Theory”, which carefully study and interpret works of Aristotle, Hobbes, Marx, etc. As teachers themselves point out, these courses are hard, and pedagogy is very intensive. Students should meet weekly with faculty advisors for a focused discussion of classic texts, most of which are over 100 years old. At the same time, the demand for this program is amazingly high. Another humanitarian program “Great Books Learning” at the University of Texas in 2018 received 500 applications for 130 student places. We can also mention that the fastest growing degree program at the School of Arts and Humanities at Johns Hopkins University also offers Homer, biblical texts, Dante, Kierkegaard, Thomas Mann and contemporary cinema as objects of study.

Obviously, the more people read, ponder and worry, the more difficult it is to manipulate and control them. They can resist various forms of radicalism, brainwashing, and self-confident lies. Perhaps this is one of the main reasons for the dislike of the 21st century for humanities. These examples show that the strength of the seeking mind, not inculcated truths, thirst for knowledge, not for skills, and human emotional experiences, not cold calculation, can mean more than profitable investments in education that bring quick financial income.

It is possible that teachers of humanities really need to become more demanding and more critical to themselves, and then to students, in order to meet high expectations and become the navigators of society in the technology era – both for those who are already disappointed and for those who still believe in human progress. In a sense, we are all humanities to the extent that we are all members of the human community.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- As a result of snap parliamentary elections in Ukraine, President Zelensky's Servant of the People party won 43.2% of the vote and the majority of single-member constituencies to secure 254 of the parliament's 424 seats. The pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life party, Yulia Tymoshenko's Fatherland party and Petro Poroshenko's European Solidarity party received 13%, 8.2% and 8.1%, respectively. Rock singer Svyatoslav Vakarchuk's Voice party gained 5.8%.
- The violent clashes near the Kyrgyz village of Ak-Sai and the Tajik exclave of Vorukh left one Tajik national dead and at least 27 more wounded from both sides. The conflict reportedly erupted when Tajiks raised the flag of Tajikistan on the Isfara-Vorukh road. Later in the week, Tajik President Emomali Rahmon and his Kyrgyz counterpart Sooronbai Jeenbekov visited the area in an effort to ease tensions.
- Kyrgyzstan's former president Almazbek Atambayev, who was stripped of immunity by the Kyrgyz parliament and faces charges of misconduct in office, left the country on a plane from the Russian military airbase in Kant for a one-day visit to Russia. In Moscow, he met with Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the internal political situation in Kyrgyzstan.
- At the closing plenary session of the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation held in Vienna, the delegation of Tajikistan summarized the initial outcomes of the country's chairmanship in this body. The chairmanship program was focused on border security management, small arms and light weapons, stockpiles of conventional ammunition, humanitarian demining, and regional security issues in Central Asia.
- In an interview to the RT TV channel and Latin American journalists, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accused the previous Georgian leadership under Mikhail Saakashvili in breaking off diplomatic relations and limiting economic cooperation between Russia and Georgia. According to Lavrov, Western countries, primarily the United States, try in every way to tear Russia's neighbors away from Russia.
- Russia and Kyrgyzstan held bilateral consultations on the fight against international terrorism in Moscow. The parties discussed security issues in Central Asia and the Middle East, including countering terrorism, extremism and illicit drug trafficking, as well as foreign terrorist fighters. Special attention was paid to identifying and suppressing sources of financial support of terrorists.
- The high-level Joint Regional Conference on Counter Terrorism and Counter Narcotics, organized by the UNODC and the foreign ministries of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan as part of the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process, was held in Almaty. Participants reviewed the current security situation in Afghanistan and ways to combine regional efforts for combating terrorism and narcotics production in this country.

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- The first cargo was delivered via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars (BTK) railway from Turkey to Georgia as a train of five cars departed from the logistics center in the Turkish Erzurum region and arrived in Tbilisi. This was a test shipment of several thousand tons of cargo since the 826-km BTK railway connecting Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey currently operates in a test mode.
- The 16th meeting of the Turkey-Russia intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation and a joint session of the business councils of the two countries were held in Antalya. The parties agreed to boost economic cooperation to reach the target of \$100 billion in bilateral trade and to launch an online business platform for promoting interests of Turkish and Russian companies.
- The fifth meeting of the Turkey-Uzbekistan intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation held in Ankara was focused on the strengthening of economic ties between the two countries. The parties signed a number of agreements, including on the introduction of a visa-free regime for Uzbek drivers. Representatives of more than 450 Turkish companies attended the business forum organized alongside the event.
- The Pakistan-Uzbekistan business forum dedicated to the investment, export and tourism potential of Uzbekistan was held in the Pakistani city of Sialkot. Following the presentation of detailed information on Uzbekistan's investment climate and export opportunities, the parties exchanged views on further strengthening bilateral trade and investment cooperation in the leather industry and the production of medical equipment.
- Since the beginning of 2019, the trade between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan decreased by 10.5% amounting to \$318.3 million. Kazakh exports to Kyrgyzstan dropped by 16.6% down to \$217.5 million, whereas imports from Kyrgyzstan grew by 6.3% and reached \$100.8 million. The decline in mutual trade runs contrary to the plan of the two countries to increase the trade turnover up to \$1 billion by 2020.
- In the first half of 2019, the passenger traffic through the Kazakh seaport of Kuryk in the Caspian Sea increased by 14 times, amounting to 4,680 people compared to 332 people in the same period of 2018. This number is already higher than the total passenger traffic in 2018, which was equal to 3,623 passengers.
- In January-June 2019, Georgia exported 37 million 795.8 thousand liters of alcoholic beverages, which is 8.4% less than in the same period in 2018. At the same time, exports of natural grape wine increased by 7.9%, to 30 million 728.8 thousand liters, while exports of strong alcoholic beverages decreased by 1.8 times, to 7 million 67 thousand liters.

Society and Culture

- A thematic Starting September 1, 2019, Azerbaijan will cancel entry visas for Turkish citizens. Nationals of Turkey who intend to visit Azerbaijan for up to 30 days will be exempt from the visa requirement, while the status of Turkish citizens who wish to stay in the country for more than 30 days will be regulated by the relevant legislation.
- Turkmenistan sent a truck convoy to Afghanistan with a large batch of humanitarian cargo, containing medicines and medical supplies, textiles and children's clothing, school textbooks and supplies, confectionery and other products. Turkmenistan continues to contribute to the establishment of peace in Afghanistan and the development of its socio-economic infrastructure through a number of projects, including the supply of electricity and liquefied gas.
- A workshop on facilitating the rehabilitation of prisoners convicted of violent extremism, including returning foreign terrorist fighters, was held in Nur-Sultan. During the three-day event, 50 officials from Kazakhstan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and National Security Committee, as well as representatives of academia and civil society, learned about methods and practices applied in penitentiary systems in the treatment of such prisoners.
- The OSCE Program Office in Nur-Sultan conducted a two-day roundtable discussion on the sustainable management of the Zhayyk (Ural) river basin ecosystem, which traverses Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation. About 70 participants from the two countries discussed the main challenges in managing the transboundary river basin and reviewed cooperation opportunities in accordance with best international practices.
- The 8th International Cultural and Tourist Festival "Manas" was held in the Akto county of the Kizilsu Kyrgyz autonomous prefecture of China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. About 10 thousand spectators, including foreign guests, watched the colorful theatrical opening ceremony of the festival with the participation of about 2 thousand people. This year's festival was held under the theme "Beautiful China, charming western lands".
- The Kyrgyz-Russian Youth Leaders Forum was held in Bishkek to discuss joint initiatives for promoting youth entrepreneurship, volunteering and tourism, as well as the role of rural youth in the development of regions and agriculture. The forum program also included visits to the Kyrchyn Gorge and the Rukh Ordo Cultural Center in Cholpon-Ata.
- On the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and China, the Governor's Office of Ulaanbaatar in cooperation with the Beijing Municipality organized the Beijing Days event in the Mongolian capital. Being organized for the first time in Ulaanbaatar, the Beijing Days featured the exhibitions of Beijing heritages, eco-friendly street lighting and a concert.