

# China's universities on the march

Growing prestige of institutes and enhanced career opportunities are attracting more international students

The *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings for 2018 — arguably the most prestigious and credible such ranking — was published on Sept 5. And once again Chinese universities experienced an impressive rise.



Mike Bastin

China's Tsinghua and Peking universities both rose again, with Tsinghua climbing five places to 30th in the rankings, only three places behind Peking, which rose two places to joint 27th in this year's rankings.

Peking and Tsinghua, China's top two universities, have improved upon last year in both teaching and research.

Peking University now occupies a position jointly with the world-renowned Edinburgh and New York universities, and Tsinghua overtook University of California, San Diego.

Two further Chinese universities also climbed into the world's top 50: Hong Kong University (ranked 40th) and Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (close behind in 44th place).

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, ranked 58th, also climbed comfortably into the world's top 100, making a total of five Chinese universities among the world's elite.

A ranking inside the world's top 100 is widely considered strategically important to any university's global credibility.

Narrowly outside the top 100 now sit Shanghai's Fudan University (ranked 116th) and City University of Hong Kong (ranked 119th). Also inside the world's top 150 sits China's University of Science and Technology (132nd).

Nanjing (169th), Zhejiang (177th), Hong Kong Polytechnic University (182nd), Shanghai Jiao Tong (188th) and the National Taiwan University (198th) combine for a grand total of 13 Chinese universities that now occupy positions inside the world's top 200.

According to the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities, a list from the Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, or CSIC (the largest public research body in Spain), 26,368 universities around the world should be included in any respectable world rankings survey and assessment.

This provides important perspective and, according to this global number, means that these top-13 Chinese universities are easily among the world's top 1 percent.



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In total, 77 countries are represented in the CSIC ranking but only 27 of those have one or more universities in the top 200, which also puts into clear perspective the representation of a whopping 13 Chinese universities in the elite group.

The results, which are subject to an independent audit by professional services firm PwC, are calculated using 13 performance indicators underlying five metrics: Research, teaching, research influence, industry income and international outlook.

In addition to these five metrics is the growing attractiveness of a Chinese university education across the international student community.

But why is this? What changes are taking place inside many Chinese universities that in recent years have made them far more attractive and internationally competitive?

The answer to this important question can probably best be summarized in five key points:

**• Chinese universities' growing reputation:** At both the undergraduate and postgraduate level, Chinese universities' credibility has been increasing steadily in recent years. International respect and recognition is something they have demonstrated recently with significant rises in major global rankings.

For example, in 2011 only six Chinese universities made it into the *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings, but recently this number has soared.

**• Chinese government support for and investment in international students is substantial and increasing:** The Chinese government is offering a wide range and record number of attractive funding opportunities to international students.

For example, there are currently more than 40,000 scholarships at almost 300 Chinese universities to offer to international students. The number of scholarships available has increased fivefold since 2006, and now more than 40 percent of all international students new to China receive some form of government sponsorship.

**• The career-enhancing implications are considerable:** Knowledge of the Chinese business environment and experience of living in the country can only increase any student's international career prospects.

Chinese companies and China generally are growing in global significance, and the chances of working inside China or with a Chinese company are high. Studying at a Chinese university, of course, also presents the perfect opportunity to learn the language, also a major career boost.

Crucial skills and strengths such as open-mindedness, flexibility and cross-cultural teamwork can only increase substantially with significant time spent living and studying in China.

**• An increasing number of Chinese cities have respected**

**universities:** Until quite recently it was mainly the first-tier cities of Beijing and Shanghai where the vast majority of international students chose to study.

But right now only 32 percent of the international students studying in China are based in either of those cities. Currently, there are as many as 13 Chinese cities in which more than 10,000 international students are situated, seven of which have more than 20,000.

For example, southwestern cities such as Chengdu and Chongqing are increasingly popular, as are Dalian and Harbin in the northeast.

**• Studying in China is a growing trend:** The overall number of international students in China has doubled in the last 10 years.

China now boasts the third-largest population of international students in the world, close behind the United States and the United Kingdom. The growth rate, averaging 10 percent per year for each of the last 10 years, is far higher than any other international study destination.

An impressive and increasing number of countries now make up the varied cultural backgrounds of international students currently studying in China.

Ten years ago, South Korea was by far the country from which most international students came, making up more than one-third of all international students then studying in China.

But now this figure has fallen to only 17 percent and more than

10 countries each contribute more than 3 percent of the current total of international students.

But perhaps most significant of all, and the most important reason behind the global rise of Chinese universities, is the adoption of a far more participative teaching and learning culture.

Increasing numbers of Chinese universities now incorporate student engagement, discussion and debate in all aspects of the learning experience. Teamwork, assessed group presentations and critical discussion and feedback now feature far more heavily.

For example, continuous assessment rather than written examinations is now far more common, and students are expected to challenge their tutors and each other with critical points of view.

International students considering a university education in China will also find that an increasing number of their Chinese tutors have experienced an international education, and there will be a large number of tutors from many other countries as well.

All in all, studying at a Chinese university now provides an ideal opportunity to become far better prepared for any international career.

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