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# Tertiary Education at a Glance: China

中国高等教育概览

Kai Yu  
Andrea Lynn Stith  
Li Liu  
Huizhong Chen



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## Introduction

This publication aims to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of higher education in China. It aims to constitute a valuable resource for students, scholars, and policy makers for understanding higher education in the world's most populous country.

This report is the result of a partnership established between the World Bank Human Development Network and Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Graduate School of Education to collect and disseminate information on higher education in China.

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# **Foreword**

With over 30 million students and over 2,600 universities and colleges, China has become the world's largest provider of tertiary education; yet its participation rate in tertiary education is still only 23%. Every year, millions of applicants suffer rejection from universities and colleges, in many instances because of limited places available. With a culture that emphasizes the importance of education, the pursuit of education of the highest quality and to the highest levels possible is actively promoted, and the potential for growth in the tertiary sector of the country remains enormous. Furthermore, China has displayed a resilient commitment not only to expanding the system, but also to investing in improving quality across the system and especially at its best institutions, in the pursuit of the status of world-class universities. There is no doubt that interest in Chinese tertiary education will only grow as the country becomes an increasingly important player on the world's economic stage.

Despite this dramatic transformation and the amount of attention China gets in the global media and international academic communities, Chinese tertiary education is rarely studied, let alone understood, by researchers outside the country. The lack of accessible and reliable information poses a major obstacle to international comparative studies and exchange of information on tertiary education in China.

This report, which was undertaken as a key component in the piloting of the World Bank's efforts on Benchmarking Education Systems for Results (BESR), provides new and important insights into the state of tertiary education in China, both in the present and, where available, over time. Such a dynamic investigation of Chinese

tertiary education, inspired by the OECD's annual "Education at a Glance" publication, is a significant and timely contribution to the literature and data on global tertiary education. The data presented in the project have been collected from several sources, including statistical publications such as the National Statistics on Education Yearbook and other statistical yearbooks, government authorities such as the Chinese Ministry of Education, and other sources. They allow an examination of both the health of the provincial and national systems as well as its outputs.

This publication aims to provide a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of tertiary education in China. As such, it should constitute a valuable resource for students, scholars, and policy makers interested in understanding tertiary education in the world's most populous country. Moreover, the benchmarking of tertiary education in China against other nations, at all stages of economic development, will inform the dialogue on global tertiary education across all stakeholders.

Dr. Jamil Salmi  
Tertiary Education Coordinator  
World Bank

## **Preface**

When compared with the length of China's illustrious past, the history of Chinese modern higher education is indeed short. Nonetheless, it is vital to our present and undeniably linked to our future. As a university president, it is my job and my responsibility to help secure a bright future for my students, my university and my country. So, while I do see our future as bright, I am aware that for some, our present remains a mystery and our future doubtful. This book is not designed to prove those skeptics wrong.

This volume explicates Chinese social, political and educational values and ties them to the present — all so that we can ask appropriate and meaningful questions about our future. As this future will increasingly be influenced by circumstances beyond national borders, we are happy to present this book to an international audience. We see your interest in this book as the initiation of a new and important dialogue; and of a more promising future, realized through the generation of greater common knowledge. Thus, we are grateful to the World Bank and to their Tertiary Education Coordinator, Dr. Jamil Salmi, for their support in the publication of this volume.

Because Shanghai Jiao Tong University (SJTU) shares a common historical root with the origins of higher education in modern China, I am truly pleased that scholars associated with this institution had the opportunity to write this book. At the end of the 19th century, during a period of reform and national “self-strengthening,” China's first two modern universities were established and given the mission to help modernize and strengthen the country through education. One of those institutions is today's Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Since this time, we have remained true to this mission and done our utmost for the nation by consistently pursuing excellence. It is imperative, however, that we acknowledge and embrace the reality that contemporary standards of excellence are defined globally.

Over the past three decades, the world has witnessed China's rapid economic growth and internationalization. Today, the universities and colleges across our nation are vibrant, teeming with students, and exuding new confidence. Supported by the opening-up policy and additional social reforms, a strong movement towards the internationalization of Chinese higher education has begun. China is now engaged in numerous international educational collaborations and we need to actively participate in the international discussion concerning the evolution of higher education.

With the growing integration of the world's economies, there is a pressing responsibility for universities to foster China into an innovation-oriented country. In order to ensure an additional 30 years of sustainable growth, it is critically important to build indigenous research capacity and cultivate innovative talent that is ready and able to draw from global perspectives.

However, as society continues to move forward, our social fabric is changing profoundly. The complexities of modern life and rapid technological development make it urgent for the country to understand the new realities and possibly redirect current endeavors. Continued progress will also require universities to reconsider who we are educating, for what purpose, and in what way.

Rapid change has brought about a new era that inspires the revitalization of tertiary education in China. Many of the challenges presently facing Chinese higher education are the same as those being coped with by colleges and universities all over the world. Rising to meet these challenges requires better-coordinated approaches and more coherent local, regional, national, and international policies. Therefore, it is crucial indeed that this thorough English-language volume, which includes complete statistics about Chinese institutions of higher learning, is published. I believe that this manuscript is an important component of China's contribution to the global discussion.

Professor Zhang Jie  
President of Shanghai Jiao Tong University  
Academician of Chinese Academy of Sciences  
Member of German Academy of Sciences  
Fellow of The Academy of Sciences for Developing World

# **Acknowledgments**

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This report is the result of a partnership established between the World Bank and Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Graduate School of Education to collect and disseminate information on higher education in China. The authors are grateful to Dr. Jamil Salmi, Dr. Roberta Malee Bassett, and Prof. Nian Cai Liu for the opportunity to be involved in this exciting project.

The authors would like to especially thank Prof. Philip G. Altbach ( Boston College), Prof. Marijk van der Wende ( Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and OECD), and Prof. Gareth Parry ( University of Sheffield) who assisted the research team in the design and development of this project. However, full responsibility for errors and misinterpretations remains with the authors.



# **Glossary**

<b><i>Benke</i></b>	The academic track in undergraduate education, usually leading to the Bachelor's degree qualification. ( See <i>Zhuanke</i> . )
<b><i>Chengren Gaokao</i></b>	National admissions examination for adult learners entering adult higher education institutions.
<b><i>Duli Xueyuan</i></b>	Independent college, a jointly institution established by a public university or college and a private investor.
<b><i>Gaokao</i></b>	National admissions examination for higher education. While there are two main types ( <i>Putong</i> and <i>Chengren Gaokao</i> ), this term usually refers to <i>Putong Gaokao</i> . This type of <i>Gaokao</i> leads to admission to <i>Putong</i> , or regular, higher education institutions.
<b><i>Gongban</i></b>	Public university or college.
<b><i>Minban</i></b>	Private institutions, literally meaning “run by the people”.
<b><i>Mutixuexiao</i></b>	Literally translates as “mother institution”. For independent colleges, this refers to the public university or college under the auspices of which they have been established.
<b><i>Putong</i></b>	Literally translates as “regular”. It refers to institutions offering full-time, on-campus, state-recognized undergraduate programs. This excludes distance learning, adult education, and some special institutions.
<b><i>Putong Gaokao</i></b>	National Examination for Admission to Regular Higher Education Institutions ( aka National College Entrance Examination ). The standard route to higher education for

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traditional students.

***Tongzhao***

The national admissions process for higher education.

***Tongzhao Benke***

*Benke* programs that admit students through the national admission process for higher education.

***Zhuanke***

The vocational track in undergraduate education, usually leading to the Vocational Diploma qualification. ( See *Benke* )

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# Chapter 1

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## China — Country Profile

### Geography and Demographics

China has a total area of 9.6 million km<sup>2</sup> (3.7 million square miles), a land mass of 9.3 million km<sup>2</sup> and is the world's fourth largest country in area after Russia, Canada and the United States.

The laws of the People's Republic of China (PRC) state that there are four territories under its jurisdiction. These are mainland China, the largely self-governed Hong Kong and Macau Special Administrative Regions (SARs) and Taiwan. Because each region operates its higher education system independently, the terms "China" and "Chinese" in this text will generally refer solely to higher education system in mainland China.

The approximate population of China is 1.3 billion people. In 2006 it was estimated that about 21% of the population are aged 0 – 14 years, 71% are aged 15 – 64 and 8% are aged 65 years and over. The median age of the population is 32.3 years for males and 33.2 years for females. The life expectancy is 70.89 years for males and 74.46 years for females. The labor force (those aged 15 – 64 years) stood at 940 million in 2005, and had a projected growth rate of 5.2 million persons per year on average over the following decade. This population is estimated to peak at 997 million in 2016, while the general population size is projected to peak at around 1.6 billion by 2050. The central government's goal to stabilize the population in the