

CHINA ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Executive Summary

1. China began its quest for world class universities in the late 1990s. Since then top Chinese universities have become more international in terms of the faculty, students, curriculum, research and network memberships.
2. Starting from a relatively low number of 13,700 students in 2000, China had about 80,000 international students pursuing tertiary degrees in 2008. Including non-degree students, the number totaled more than 220,000 in 2008.
3. The rapid growth is not only unprecedented in Chinese history, but also remarkable against the global trend. Foreign students enrolled worldwide grew from 2 million to 3.3 million between 2000 and 2008. World growth was rapid by its past standards, but nowhere near China's growth rate.
4. In less than a decade, China has emerged as a major player in global competition for international students. It is the only developing country among the ten largest hosting countries in the world.
5. Non-degree students continue to constitute the majority, making up nearly two thirds in 2008. The low percentage of degree students sets China apart from other major hosting countries.
6. More than half of the international students study the Chinese language. Far fewer students study economics, management, sciences and engineering in Chinese universities as compared to their counterparts in western universities.
7. More than two thirds of international students come from Asia. With the exception of the United States, the largest source countries are China's neighboring countries. South Korea is by far the largest origin.
8. Realizing the large gaps with major hosting countries, the Chinese government stresses the need to increase the enrollment, raise the educational levels, and

improve the quality of international students. Over time, the share of degree students has been on the rise.

9. China's rise as a new magnet for international students reflects its growing influence in the global higher education market. The trend is most likely to continue, as China plans to attract 500,000 international students by 2020, making it the top destination in Asia.
10. In the coming decades, the big challenge for China is less whether it can surpass other major hosting countries in the number of international students, but whether its top universities can attract the brightest students for degree education, just as what the top American and European universities have done in the past decades.