

DRIVING AI EXCELLENCE: HOW CHINA'S TOP UNIVERSITIES ARE SHAPING THE FUTURE OF TECHNOLOGY

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China's AI surge is powered by its universities, which have transformed into strategic engines of innovation and talent development. Institutions like Peking and Tsinghua University have launched elite AI programmes, expanded admissions and integrated research with industry—creating a pipeline of domestically trained AI experts. The launch of DeepSeek-R1, developed by young homegrown scientists, showcases the success of this education-centred strategy.

Central to this transformation is a state-led campaign embedding AI into higher education, guided by policies like the New Generation AI Plan and the 2025 education blueprint. Universities have established dedicated AI colleges, interdisciplinary research hubs and experimental “AI+X” programmes linking AI with fields from medicine to social sciences. Already in 2023, 500 universities had AI programmes, positioning China as the world's largest incubator of AI talent. Yet challenges remain: sustaining quality, fostering fundamental research and balancing applied focus with theoretical breakthroughs to achieve global leadership.

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Chinese:

推动人工智能卓越：中国顶尖大学如何塑造技术的未来

中国的人工智能浪潮由其大学驱动，这些大学已经转型为创新和人才发展的战略引擎。像北京大学和清华大学这样的机构启动了精英人工智能项目，扩大招生并将研究与产业结合，打造出一批本土培养的人工智能专家。由年轻本土科学家开发的 DeepSeek-R1 展示了这种以教育为中心的战略的成功。

这场变革的核心是一场由国家主导的运动，将人工智能融入高等教育，并受到新一代人工智能计划和 2025 教育蓝图等政策的指导。各大学已经建立了专门的人工智能学院、跨学科研究中心和实验性的“人工智能+X”项目，将人工智能与从医学到社会科学的领域相结合。截止到 2023 年，已有 500 所大学设立了人工智能项目，使中国成为全球最大的人工智能人才孵化器。然而，要想实现全球领先，中国仍然存在挑战：维持质量、促进基础研究以及在应用重点与理论突破之间取得平衡。

French:

PROMOUVOIR L'EXCELLENCE EN IA: COMMENT LES MEILLEURES UNIVERSITÉS CHINOISES FAÇONNENT LA TECHNOLOGIE DU FUTUR

La montée en puissance de l'IA en Chine est propulsée par ses universités, qui se sont transformées en moteurs stratégiques d'innovation et de développement de talents. Des institutions comme l'Université de Pékin et l'Université Tsinghua ont lancé des programmes d'IA d'élite, élargi les admissions et intégré la recherche avec l'industrie, créant ainsi un vivier local d'experts. Le lancement de DeepSeek-R1, développé par de jeunes scientifiques locaux, illustre le succès de cette stratégie centrée sur l'éducation.

Au cœur de cette transformation se trouve une campagne menée par l'État, intégrant l'IA dans l'enseignement supérieur, guidée par des politiques telles que le Plan de l'IA de nouvelle génération et la feuille de route éducative 2025. Les universités ont établi des collèges dédiés à l'IA, des centres de recherche interdisciplinaires et des programmes expérimentaux "IA+X" liant l'IA à des domaines allant de la médecine aux sciences sociales. En 2023, 500 universités avaient des programmes d'IA, positionnant la Chine comme le plus grand incubateur de talents en IA au monde. Cependant, des défis subsistent pour atteindre la position de leader mondial dans le domaine. Il s'agit notamment de maintenir la qualité, d'encourager la recherche fondamentale, ainsi que d'équilibrer l'accent mis sur l'application avec des avancées théoriques.

Spanish:

IMPULSANDO LA EXCELENCIA EN IA: CÓMO LAS PRINCIPALES UNIVERSIDADES DE CHINA ESTÁN MODELANDO EL FUTURO DE LA TECNOLOGÍA

El auge de la inteligencia artificial en China está impulsado por sus universidades, que se han transformado en motores estratégicos de innovación y desarrollo de talento. Instituciones como la Universidad de Pekín y la Universidad de Tsinghua han lanzado programas de IA de élite, ampliado las admisiones e integrado la investigación con la industria, creando un flujo de expertos en IA formados localmente. El lanzamiento de DeepSeek-R1, desarrollado por jóvenes científicos locales, muestra el éxito de esta estrategia centrada en la educación.

Central a esta transformación es una campaña liderada por el estado que incorpora la IA en la educación superior, guiada por políticas como el Plan de IA de Nueva Generación y el plan educativo para 2025. Las universidades han establecido facultades dedicadas a la IA, centros de investigación interdisciplinarios y programas experimentales de "IA+X" que vinculan la IA con campos que van desde la medicina hasta las ciencias sociales. Ya en 2023, 500 universidades contaban con programas de IA, posicionando a China como el mayor incubador de talento en IA del mundo. Sin embargo, quedan desafíos: mantener la calidad, fomentar la investigación fundamental y equilibrar el enfoque aplicado con los avances teóricos para lograr el liderazgo global.

Executive Summary

1. China's artificial intelligence (AI) rise is rooted in state-led coordination of talent and technology. Breakthroughs such as the cost-efficient DeepSeek-R1—developed by domestically trained researchers—underscore China's growing self-reliance. The Paulson Institute ranks China as the world's leading producer of elite AI talent.
2. The 2017 New Generation AI Development Plan laid out a clear roadmap for transformation, charting a three-stage trajectory: achieving AI parity by 2020, global leadership in select areas by 2025 and overall dominance by 2030.
3. Universities are crucial to this national strategy. Through the Strengthening Foundation Plan (2020), China has prioritised elite Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) recruitment, interdisciplinary AI training and close university-industry collaboration.
4. Flagship initiatives such as Peking University's Turing and General AI Classes and Tsinghua University's Yao Class have set new benchmarks for excellence, while over 500 universities now offer AI degrees, reflecting deep systemic commitment.
5. Enrolment trends illustrate a strategic realignment. After a surge in humanities and social sciences during the 2000s, Chinese universities have begun pivoting towards engineering from 2012—accelerating especially in AI fields since the late 2010s.
6. China's approach is distinguished by its systematic integration of policy, academia and industry. The “AI+X” model embeds AI across disciplines, accelerated by national labs and corporate partnerships for rapid commercialisation.
7. This approach benefits from scale, coordination and agility. Since 2017, over 60 AI-focused colleges have been established, reflecting a level of central planning that contrasts with the United States' decentralised innovation ecosystem and the EU's regulation-first strategy.

8. If China succeeds in boosting basic research alongside applied innovation, its tripartite model—uniting state, academia and industry—could offer a new paradigm for technological leadership.
9. China’s AI trajectory has profound global implications. As geopolitical competition with the United States intensifies, China’s ability to sustain momentum in AI may reshape power dynamics and the international order.