

CLIMBING UP THE RANKINGS

China overtakes the UK

H1 ACT PLAN TRACK PARK OPP THR NEU

[China dominates the ranking of universities in the world's emerging economies](#). Not only are seven of the 10 best emerging-market universities in China, but 81 of its institutions feature in the Times Higher Education's (THE) list for 2020. That's more than any other country. With 56 universities in the ranking, India is the second-most-represented country out of the 47 that appear in the list.

But this is only part of the story.

Tsinghua University recently became the first Chinese institution to enter the top 20 of the [Times Higher Education World University Rankings](#). Fudan University and Zhejiang University also broke into the top 100, taking the number of Chinese institutions in that bracket to six – compared with only three 10 years earlier.

In a single generation, China's university system has been transformed into one whose most prominent members are producing world-class research and moving into the upper echelons of global rankings.

China recently overtook the UK on an annual list of nations with [the most highly cited scholars](#), published by Clarivate Analytics, putting it second behind the US. And China's involvement in what Clarivate deems cutting-edge areas of science is now similar in scale to that of the US, particularly in physical science.

These achievements are the result of 20 years of reform, implemented via highly centralised government control. Top universities have been pushed to adopt corporate management styles ruthlessly focused on meeting key performance indicators such as research citation volumes and ranking positions. In return, they have been enrolled in a series of lucrative excellence initiatives that have seen their budgets mushroom.

WHERE ARE ALL THE JOBS?

China's narrowing opportunities

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In 1997, China had fewer than 3.5 million undergraduate and graduate students. In 2019, there were more than 33 million, not counting online schools and adult higher education institutions

China's economy has largely rebounded from the coronavirus pandemic, with data released in January 2021 showing it has become perhaps the only major economy [to have grown last year](#). But the recovery has been mostly fuelled by [blue-collar sectors](#) such as manufacturing, on which the Chinese economy still relies heavily. The one area of the economy that remains sorely lacking? The supply of desirable, well-paying jobs for the country's rapidly ballooning count of university graduates.

China's Ministry of Education announced at the height of the outbreak that it would order universities to [expand the number of master's candidates](#) by 189,000, a nearly 25 percent increase, to ease unemployment. Undergraduate slots would also increase by more than 300,000.

Even before the pandemic, the country's graduates complained that there were not enough suitable jobs. Now, many Chinese have worried that the expansion of graduate slots will increase already fierce competition for jobs, dilute the value of advanced degrees or postpone an unemployment crisis. And so, 3.77 million new graduates took the national entrance exam for graduate school in December 2020 - an 11 percent increase from the year before and more than double the number from 2016.

It is, of course, only a delaying tactic – and one that is unlikely to have much success. Chu Chaohui, a researcher at China's National Institute of Education Sciences, [told the state-owned Global Times tabloid](#) that graduates should lower their sights. If they did so, he said, they would find jobs in sectors such as food or parcel delivery.

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