

China: new 'champions for globalisation' could claim US crown

The political changes of 2017 will benefit China, and influence the future of international student mobility, says Marguerite Dennis

June 26, 2017



By [Marguerite Dennis \(/author/marguerite-dennis\)](#)



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It would be easy to write an article about the impressive rise of China's higher education system and the impact of Chinese students on



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In 2017, more than 700,000 Chinese students will study abroad, some to study in high schools and colleges, others to study abroad for a shorter period of time, perhaps for language study. According to one article in *The Economist*, 57 per cent of Chinese parents would like to send their children abroad for study.

But this is not an article about increasing Chinese student numbers. This article is an attempt to see to tomorrow and how China may and can emerge as a higher education superpower in the coming years.

Reputation Rankings 2017: China has six institutions in the top 100 (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/world-reputation-rankings-2017-results-announced>)

The US columnist Ian Bremer predicts that American international leadership, a constant since 1945, will end this year. The US has become the single biggest source of international uncertainty, creating a void that China is eager to fill.

Xi Jinping, China's most powerful leader since Deng Xiaoping, has been called the "chairman of everything". His policies have ushered in a new territorial assertiveness as evidenced by recent events. The fawning reception given him in January at the World Economic Forum in Davos (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/davos-universities-period-upheaval-video>) signalled the importance of the Chinese president on the world stage. And the chairman did not disappoint.

He presented himself (<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/davos-universities-may-have-found-unlikely-ally-chinas-chris-parr>) and his country as champions for globalisation and open markets, and he suggested that China should guide economic globalisation in the future. Mr. Xi frequently referenced the "Chinese dream of the great revival of the Chinese nation".

Contrast these sentiments with the inward-looking policies of the US, and it is easy to understand why Xi's comments were not lost on the attendees of the World Economic Forum. Nor were they lost on the countries in Asia and Southeast Asia, such as Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia.

In May this year, the first Belt and Road Forum (<http://www.un.org/pga/71/2017/05/14/belt-and-road-forum-for-international-cooperation/>) was held in Beijing. This initiative boasts spending \$150 billion in infrastructure projects in countries south and west of China, along the historical Silk Road. The overarching aim of the project is to construct a network of ports, railways and pipelines that will plug China into economic hubs across Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe.

The founding of the Asian Universities Alliance (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/new-asia-alliance-build-continents-he-momentum>), with an initial membership of 15 universities from across the region, has initial funding of \$1.5 million from Tsinghua University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/tsinghua-university>) and is an example of China flexing its higher education muscles.

Joining Tsinghua University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/tsinghua-university>) are several academic powerhouses in the region, including Peking University, the University of Tokyo (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/university-of-tokyo>), Seoul National University (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/seoul-national-university>), the National University of Singapore (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/national-university-of-singapore>) and the University of Malaysia.

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According to Yoichi Funabashi, chairman of the Tokyo-based thinktank Rebuild Japan Initiative Foundation, China can and will use its economic pull to draw Asian nations into its geopolitical orbit. Inevitably, political and economic ties eventually translate into educational ties.

Joseph Nye, who coined the term “soft power” in 1990, would certainly agree that China’s initiatives are good examples of making “soft power” investments that really are expressions of hard power.

What does this mean for the future of international student enrolment in the US? It is my opinion that if, and when, US policies change, it will still take a long time to untangle current perceptions and realities. International deans and recruiters will have to accept the reality of the increasing importance of China’s educational prowess and adjust future strategic plans accordingly.

There will be opportunities for US colleges and universities in the new world order. But these opportunities will demand a different way of recruiting from today’s standard procedures. International deans and recruiters will have to think differently and will have to focus more on collaboration and less on the go-it-alone strategies many schools use today.

Marguerite Dennis is a higher education consultant.

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