



Great jobs for bright people

How to pursue an academic career in China

Part One: Finding opportunities in China





Finding opportunities in China

This ebook is the first in a two-part guide primarily aimed at those seeking to pursue an academic career opportunity in China. Some of the information will also be useful to Chinese citizens who studied overseas and are contemplating returning to China to work as an academic. While the focus is on academic careers, many of China's universities also have foreigners who work in administration, especially in the international office, as well as those involved in the teaching of English and working with the increasing number of international students that are coming to China.

What this ebook will cover:

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Presenting as a strong candidate

The fundamentals of being a strong candidate are much the same in China as in any other major university application. These include, among other things, a relevant doctorate degree from a ranked and accredited university, a record of research publication in good journals, positive teaching evaluations, an area of specialisation that meets department needs and fits in with, and builds upon, existing department strengths, evidence of good cultural fit, flexibility, excellent communication skills, and excellent references.

For China, it helps greatly to have made some personal contact with the university ahead of time and to have some 'relationship', for example having worked with a faculty member at that university or been well known to them. Demonstrating cultural sensitivity, flexibility and excellent communication skills are especially important as is some international involvement or experience.

Preparing for and succeeding at interview

While there is no such thing as a 'standard' interview, normally you are asked to give a talk for about 30 minutes to the selection committee as if you are giving a lecture to students. You will be asked some questions by panel members with regard to your teaching, research and other things. To succeed in the interview, you need to at least:

- **Prepare your talk well**
- **Research** the university and the faculty as much as possible
- **Make sure you fully understand all the job requirements and be sure to have certified copies of essential documents**, such as university testamurs, transcripts, and your passport
- **Evidence excellent communication skills, speak clearly and a little more slowly than usual in case some panel members are not native speakers. Use well prepared visual aids** such as a professionally produced PowerPoint. Be sure, for example, not to have too many words on a slide. Use a **picture or graph** where you can. Write in **bullet points**.
- **Show that you enjoy teaching and engaging with students; that you are friendly and enthusiastic**
- **Demonstrate that you would be a friendly, flexible, positive and cooperative colleague**
- **Demonstrate how and where you would add value to the department specifically and to the university generally**

How to find job opportunities

Deciding to live and work overseas is a big step and it is important to do your homework. The good news is that there are many pathways that can get you to China.

Finding opportunities requires both a self-assessment of your particular strengths and interests as well as an outward evaluation of the different higher education markets that need what you have to offer. There are multiple ways to find out about international opportunities. One of the best is through leading career sites such as jobs.ac.uk, others include:

- **Major job listing sites, government employment sites, major international and national agencies** and others will often post international jobs, projects and consulting opportunities. Many governments seek to both internationalise their faculty and attract foreign faculty members to work with their local faculty.
- There are special programs like the **Fulbright awards** as well as international exchanges and **volunteer opportunities for faculty**.
- When travelling abroad one can visit other universities and get to know **foreign scholars who are teaching and researching in the same area**. These connections often lead to joint papers, projects, visiting lectures, short-term teaching, research consulting and other opportunities abroad.

Returning Chinese scholars

If you are a native Chinese academic who has obtained a PhD degree abroad and want to be an academic in China, you could have an advantage over those who obtained their PhDs from Chinese universities because you may have:

- 1) A more advanced knowledge and training in your area;
- 2) A good grasp of a foreign language, which is necessary for future exchanges and communications.

However, even graduates from a top world university today may have to start from the level of a Lecturer, not an Associate Professor.



Chinese government initiatives

In the last two decades the Chinese government has introduced a number of initiatives aimed at building world class universities. These include the 211 project and the 985 project which were targeted at developing the research capacity of the Chinese higher education system. In addition, the government introduced the Changjiang Scholar's and 1000 talents programmes with the aim of attracting top Chinese and foreign scholars from overseas to work in China.

Project 211

Project 211, entitled "High-level Universities and Key Disciplinary Fields" project, was initiated in 1995 by the Ministry of Education with the aim of improving the research standards of top Chinese universities for the 21st Century. In its first three stages (1996-2000, 2002-2006 and 2007-2011), the project involved the investment of more than ¥17.7 billion (£1,752 billion)* by the Ministry of Education in more than 100 universities, on the condition that this would be more than equally matched by provincial and local government authorities.

The project includes 118 universities which have met the required standards of the Ministry of Education in relation to their research outputs and provision of advanced degree programmes. These universities make up only 6 percent of the 1,700 higher education institutions in China. They train over 80 percent of China's doctoral students and two-thirds of graduate students, and run 96 percent of the country's key laboratories.

Project 985

Project 985, entitled the "World Class Universities" projects, was first announced by Chinese President Jiang Zemin in 1998 with the aim of promoting the reputation and research capacity of the very top Chinese universities. The project involves both the Ministry of Education and provincial governments allocating significant funds to build research centres, attract world-class faculties and assist Chinese faculties to do research overseas. Although the government concentrated its funding on nine top universities in the first stage of the project, the number of universities was expanded to 39 in the second stage. Under project 985 the amount of funding received by a university depends on the ranking of the university, and agreements between the university involved, the Ministry and provincial governments. Typically, provincial governments are expected to match funds provided by the Ministry of Education. The total investment provided by the Ministry of Education amounted to ¥14.0 billion (£385 billion)* in phase one and ¥18.9 billion (£1,870 billion)* in phase two, with half of that funding concentrated in the top nine institutions, known as China's Ivy League. The project is now in its third phase (2009-present). The government has announced it does not intend to open up this scheme to other universities and will concentrate its resources on the existing 39 institutions.

Changjiang Scholar's Programme

The Changjiang Scholar's programme was introduced in 1998 with the aim of strengthening the research capacity of the Chinese higher education system by attracting Chinese professors working overseas back to Chinese universities. Funding under the programme is provided by the Ministry of Education and the Li Kai Shing foundation to top up the salary of researchers, and provide them with significant research funding and a housing allowance. On an annual basis the programme funds the appointment of 150 distinguished professors for a period of five years and 50 chair professors for a period of three years. These appointments are decided through a review process administered by the Ministry of Education.

1000 Talents Programme

The 1000 talents programme or "Recruitment Program of Global Experts" was introduced in 2008 to facilitate the recruitment of scholars based overseas to work in China for a three year term. The scheme provides each successful applicant with a lump sum of ¥1 million (£99K)*, research funding of between ¥3 and ¥5 million ((£29K - £49K)* and contributes towards the salary costs of the host institution. By the end of 2012, more than 2,700 scholars had been recruited under the programme.

2011 Project on Innovation

Jointly administered by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Ministry of Finance, this 2011 project aims to have Chinese universities increase both their innovative capacity and the application of their research outcomes. This is in the context of China's goal to become an innovative country generating high quality and relevant research. A major component of the program is the encouragement of international cooperation that brings together world experts and researchers to work on key projects of relevance. It also seeks to boost the greater internationalisation of Chinese higher education institutions.

* Pound Sterling equivalent at September 2014

Chinese universities have been asked to form Collaborative Innovative Bodies that include industry, research institutes, and, of most interest to the Australian sector, leading foreign universities and research institutes. The Collaborative Innovative Bodies can then apply for funding to become Collaborative Innovation Centres.

Success of the research initiatives

There is some evidence to suggest that the Chinese government's investment in these key research initiatives is paying off. Recent research has shown that the rate of growth of publications amongst Chinese scholars has increased as a result of the 985 project. By the year 2008, China had overtaken the UK as the world's second largest producer of research papers and is predicted to reach the level of the USA by 2020. These research initiatives seem to have been especially beneficial to second tier universities, as their growth rates in publications have outperformed those of the top nine institutions. However, the amount of 'highly cited' papers is still significantly behind that of US and UK institutions, suggesting that the research initiatives introduced by the Chinese government might be promoting quantity over quality of research. In addition, the amount of papers published in the two top science journals 'Nature' and 'Science' has not increased significantly since the introduction of these schemes. The reasons for this are complex. Some commentators suggest this may result from a poor research culture in many institutions where more senior academics with fewer English skills and lower levels of performance monopolise the resources, making it difficult for young academics trained overseas to progress. Others have highlighted the lack of networks with editors of key journals who tend to be located in Western countries as a further constraint on the ability of Chinese scholars to get their research into top outlets.

Despite these issues, the initiatives introduced by the Chinese government have opened up their higher education sector to best practice from overseas and promoted a research culture in Chinese universities. In the coming years Chinese higher education is likely to become stronger and more competitive as a result.

How working abroad can advance your career

Working as an academic abroad can significantly enhance your career in many ways. It offers the opportunity to gain valuable teaching experience whilst also providing an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by the growing number of university students from diverse countries.

Working abroad enables you to learn international skills, for example; deepening your knowledge of other cultures and ways of doing things. In the process, you learn more about your own culture. There is so much important work to be done in developing countries and there are often significant grant and aid programmes available that can lead to valuable research opportunities, extend the global reach of your own work, gain new friends and collaborators, learn new perspectives and [much more](#).



Why consider an academic faculty opportunity in China?

There are many reasons why working in China is a very exciting and worthwhile endeavour.

China is now the second largest economy in the world; the number one exporter and number two importer. It has expanded more in the last 30 years than any other major country has grown in 100 years. This means it is an exciting place to be and much is happening that is worthy of study and researching about. The best Chinese companies are world class companies that are principally located in China and which attract the top talent from all over the world, a recent example being Jack Ma (former English teacher) and Alibaba. If your expertise is in a technical or scientific area, China will be especially interested in you and vice versa. Nanotechnology, robotics, space, transportation, highways, food safety, alternative energy, computing, and many other fields are rising rapidly in China. The 21st Century has rightly been termed the 'Asian Century' and China is at the core as you will be if you are working here.



Top reasons to work in academia in China

- 1** China is open to foreigners and knows that it needs foreign expertise if it is to realise what President Xi has termed, 'the China Dream'.
- 2** Higher education is greatly valued in China, and China has invested heavily in its top universities which have risen rapidly up the rankings. The next section demonstrates the level of commitment by the Chinese government to recruit top international academic staff.
- 3** Chinese students are hard-working, motivated and greatly respect and value education and their teachers.
- 4** There are significant numbers of foreigners in China from all around the world so you will be able to find a support group should you need or want one.
- 5** Teaching at a Chinese University will be an international experience. Not only will many of your Chinese colleagues have studied overseas, but the major universities all have multiple academic faculty members from all over the world and numerous links with international partners.
- 6** Since the Beijing Olympics especially, the tourism industry and transportation infrastructure in China are well developed and today it is far easier than ever before to travel around China.



- 7** China is one of, if not the oldest continuous civilisation in the world. It is rich in culture, history, tradition and more.
- 8** China offers a safe environment in which to live and work and has an excellent education system of both public and private international schools.
- 9** There are many dual career opportunities.
- 10** While Chinese wages are lower, the cost of living is generally lower and universities will often help subsidise key expenses such as accommodation.
- 11** Chinese infrastructure, especially in the major cities, is generally excellent both in terms of the Internet, mobile phone, transportation and other public amenities.
- 12** Foreign languages are taught in Chinese schools from primary level and therefore an increasing number of subjects at Chinese universities are taught in English and by foreign professors.
- 13** Once you return home from China, the experience will enable you to become more diversified, raise your inter-cultural IQ, make you a better teacher (especially in a class of students from other countries), open up interesting research opportunities, and help you and family members develop a lifelong network of good friends and colleagues.

Recommended reading:



The Global Academic Careers Guide

Essential advice & top tips for academics looking to expand their horizons overseas. This ebook will tell you more about the scale of new global market, help you consider the pros and cons of seeking employment outside your nation of origin, and give you important information that will improve your success rate if you do decide to give working abroad a try.

About the author:



Eugene Clark

Eugene Clark has enjoyed many research opportunities as a result of his China experience. He has had the benefit of several excellent research assistants and library support and has been invited to be an opinion columnist for the highly influential China.Org.Cn. He has represented a Chinese organisation at the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) workshop for experts on e-commerce. He has been involved in the establishment of the Asia Academy of Comparative Law and received funding to participate in leading international conferences.



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Dr Xiang Gao is Dean and Professor of Law of the College of Comparative Law, the China University of Political Science and Law. He was a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Law of the University of Canberra in Australia and a judge of the Supreme People's Court of the PRC. Professor Gao holds two LL.Ms and a PhD from the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia. He is a world expert in international trade and finance law, being a member of the Legal Committee of the ICC Banking Commission and that of the ICC Commission on Commercial Law and Practice

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