China Study Abroad Education Market Update

The People’s Republic of China is the world’s most populated country. With a population of 1,37 billion and around 40 million students in higher education, China is the largest study abroad market in the world. It has been for nearly 2 decades already. According to the ICEF monitor, a record number of Chinese students were studying for a degree abroad in 2015: a staggering 523,000. On top of that another 200,000 students are taking part in exchange programs.

Growth in China is slowing down - but China remains no 1 study abroad market in the World

According to the ICEF monitor ‘new data from the Chinese Ministry of Education reveals that both the total number of outbound students as well as the number of returnees from study abroad reached record levels in 2015. However, growth has slowed over the last two years and is notably below the average annual growth of recent decades. Figures show a 13.9% increase over 2014 levels but marks the second consecutive year – after 11.1% growth in 2014 – of growth levels below the 19.1% average annual growth over the past four decades.

Most experts seem to agree though that spending on education will increase over the next decades. “Between 2015 and 2030, China is expected to spend 12.5% of overall consumption growth on education for those under 30 – a higher share than in any other country”

read the full article

Education quick facts

Secondary education
- Starting age: 12
- Duration: 6 years
- Enrolment numbers: 45.9 million (2014)

Higher education
- Duration: 4 – 7 years
- Enrolment numbers: 40 million (2015)
- Access to higher education: 27% (2013)

Chinese students studying abroad
- 16% of all students studying abroad worldwide are from China
- Chinese students mostly go abroad for Engineering and Management programs.
- Most Chinese studying abroad do so at bachelor undergraduate level (source: Qiang, 2012),
- The Chinese Scholarship Council supported 19,000 students, including 6,500 post graduate students to study abroad.
- The US remains the most popular destination country. Japan, Australia and the UK complete the top 4.
**Trends and competitors in China**

An increasing number of foreign universities have entered the Chinese study abroad market in the last decade. The US, the UK, Australia and Canada are traditionally popular study destinations. European countries such as Germany and France have a good reputation in specific fields of study and attract many Chinese students because of that. Asian countries like Japan and Korea are also doing well. Proximity and cultural ties are often deciding factors.

- US and UK universities have opened up branches in China and started to deliver offshore education in China. A good example is the University of Nottingham. Some universities (like Liverpool University) have partnered with Chinese universities to form new alliances. Both trends are expected to continue towards 2025.
- Nations with lenient immigration policies tend to receive more Chinese students. Canada for example has enforced a less strict policy. This has led to an increase of international students.
- EU countries that have attractive tuition fee systems (like Germany, Scandinavian countries and France) tend to receive more international students because of it.
- In Germany and Sweden, exchange programs, summer schools and short courses are widely used to attract international students. These programs are often a stepping stone towards a Bachelor, Master or research program.

**Recruiting in China: role of the parents**

When devising a marketing strategy for China, please make sure to devote some chapters to the real decision makers. Chinese students are very much influenced by their parents and their professors. It is crucial to include these groups in your promotional strategies.

*Students have a say, but parents decide*

Studies demonstrate that the role of the parents is crucial. This role is shaped in part by their financial status, their personal education and their Confucian culture.

One particular study shows that ‘those parents who were more supportive or open to their child’s choices more often came from the wealthier city provinces and had personal experience of international study themselves.’ Read the full article on [Universityworldnews.com](http://Universityworldnews.com).

**Recruiting in China: working with agents**

If you are new to the Chinese market you may want to consider working with agents. It is part of the Chinese culture to use ‘intermediates’ for all kinds of services, especially in the fields that they are not familiar with, which includes applying for universities abroad. Parents also like the prospect of talking to someone who speaks their language. This is important during the application phase but also when their son or daughter is abroad. The agent will often remain their contact person.

If you consider working with an agents, please keep the following in mind:

- Check the agent’s qualification by viewing the list on the website of the [Chinese Education Ministry](http://education.com).
- Most agents charge both the institution and the students. Generally the total fee will be around 17,000 RMB (about €2,000).

**List of Agents in Beijing**

- Beijing Aoji Education Group
- Beijing Chivast Education International
- Beijing EIC Education group
- Beijing Jin Ji Lie (J JL) overseas study consulting company
- Beijing New Oriental Vision Overseas Consulting Ltd.co.

List of Agents in Shanghai
- CHEER (Shanghai)
- CIIC Education International Co.,Ltd (Shanghai)
- Overseas Study Service of Global IELTS School
- International Studies University Study –Abroad Center
- Zhongzhi International Education consulting company

Online behaviour of Chinese students
China’s rising GDP has effected consumer spending and also access to the internet. In 2012 there were around half a billion internet in China. In 2016 a staggering 712 million people have access to the virtual highway (source: internetlivestats.com). It will come as no surprise that the internet is the most important student recruitment tool in China. Schools that are serious about recruiting Chinese students are advised to also develop an online strategy.

Study abroad portals
Web portals are a great source of information for Chinese students looking to study abroad. These are the most influential platforms:

Sina education - edu.sina.com.cn - 600.000 visitors per day
Sohu go abroad - goabroad.sohu.com - 2,1 million visitors per day
Tencent education - edu.qq.com - 800.000 visitors per day
NetEase education - edu.163.com - 300.000 visitors per day
news.cn/abroad - 300.000 visitors per day

Sina, Sohu and Tencent are the largest three Chinese-language infotainment web portals in the world, followed by NetEase 163.com and news.cn. These websites are all part of comprehensive web portals: the education and study-abroad related information is just one separate section of the overall website and is displayed on sub-pages or sub-domains. These platforms are ideal for reaching large groups of young people who are interested in studying abroad.

Advertising examples
Bannering is a great option to get your message and brand across. To give you an idea about pricing: the largest platforms will charge you around 50.000 USD per month for a homepage banner. A homepage takeover ad will cost around 1,000 USD per day. A simple text ad will cost around 2,000 USD per month. Smaller platforms are cheaper. If you are looking for more engagement with your audience, you could consider an advertorial.

China, education and social media
With an Internet user population that is twice the population of the entire U.S. and hefty censorship laws that exclude popular western social media sites, China developed their own social media landscape. Sites like Tencent and Weibo boast user bases exceeding half a billion accounts. Facebook has around 1.4 billion users.
Social media and social sharing platforms that are used by students

Renren is the oldest Chinese social networking site, founded in 2005, with over 250 million users (120 million daily users). It has similar features to Facebook. Schools can use it accordingly for paid and organic campaigns.

Weibo is another interesting social media platform. Weibo is the Chinese word for blog. It uses a format similar to Twitter. It is exclusively used by Chinese language speakers. On Weibo each user can set up a real-time information-sharing community and upload information in 140 character blocks. If you are looking for inspiration, check out the University of Michigan on Weibo. It has over 20,000 Chinese fans.

Instant messaging is another feature that is hot in China. WeChat (China’s version of WhatsApp) is the biggest platform in China. WeChat provides multimedia communication with text messaging, voice messaging, one-to-many broadcast messaging, photo and video sharing, location sharing, and contact information exchange. WeChat is owned by Tencent and has 650 million users. Looking for inspiration? The University of Nottingham has been very successful promoting its WeChat channel in China.

Video sharing is another great way to reach students. Youku Tudou is the largest video site in China. It is comparable to Youtube and has similar advertising options.

Search Engine Marketing

Another great way to reach Chinese students looking to study abroad, is search engine marketing. Over 450 million Chinese people use search engines every day. Baidu is China’s largest search engine by far. It has a similar position to Google in the West. Google is third in China behind Baidu and Soso.com

Both Baidu and Soso allow you to target people with specific search queries. Payment is usually per click.