Science, Technology, Education and Health News from China

Number 117 – March 2014

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Introduction
The Story of the Month presents the recently announced reform in vocational education in China which highlights the upcoming establishment of university of applied sciences. Also in education, Chinese University of Hong Kong’s plan to establish a campus in Shenzhen is approved by the Ministry of Education. Renmin University opens China’s first public diplomacy research center. CCDI inspection team started residence inspection at Fudan University. In science and technology, Agriculture Minister announced China’s GMO approach. China overtakes Japan to top the Nature Public Index ranking. In innovation, mobile phone payment as an innovative approach in finance sector is being cracked down by the finance authorities.

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Contact

Nektarios PALASKAS
Science and Technology Counsellor
Head of Science, Technology and Education Section
Embassy of Switzerland in the People’s Republic of China
Tel: +86 10 8532 8849
Email: nektarios.palaskas@eda.admin.ch
www.eda.admin.ch/beijing

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1 Please click on the blue texts to activate the hyperlinks to either email addresses or related websites.
China to Establish University of Applied Sciences

Chinese students have already had the option of a dual track system at the secondary level. But there is a well-established consensus across the nation that the VET track is the inferior leg which is only to be considered when access to the general education track is exhausted. Such perception stems from insufficient government investment on vocational education, absence of qualified faculty and up-to-date teaching facility, weak industry engagement and a culture that overemphasizes classroom education and denounces jobs that require hard labor.

Limited option at the tertiary level education is also a strong disincentive for prospective students of the VET track. The national college entrance examination ("gaokao") used to be the only exam for students in both tracks and admission, solely being based on the gaokao scores. For students in the VET track, the three year vocational college (with diploma) is almost the only option for tertiary education. Transferring a vocational college diploma to a university bachelor degree is possible but extremely difficult.

On the basis of the existing dual track system, the Chinese Ministry of Education announced the plan to launch a "professional gaokao" in parallel with the existing "academic gaokao", open for students in both tracks. The skill-based professional gaokao will include general knowledge exam, skill test and professional aptitude test and will serve as the admission reference for VET tertiary level education, which will be expanded to include vocational colleges and university of applied sciences, a new option for vocational higher education.

Official Ministry of Education statistics indicate that China has 2'442 regular higher education institutes (HEI) in 2012, including 1'145 universities (degree program) and 1'297 higher vocational colleges (diploma program). Around 55% of the 1'145 universities used to be higher vocational colleges that eventually “upgraded” themselves to universities (typically through improving infrastructure and expanding by merging with partner institutes).

These “upgraded” universities, most of which are affiliated with the provincial or municipal governments, are the main target of the reform. These local universities will be pushed to shift their focus back on applied sciences and reshape themselves into Universities of Applied Sciences, offering degree programs at bachelor and professional master level.

The prospect students of UAS is expected to be broad and diversified, including graduates of VET schools, graduates of vocational colleges and people already in the job market. Graduates of UAS bachelor programs will be eligible to apply for professional master programs offered at academic universities and vice-versa. No specific exam & admission measures have been announced yet.

A Guideline for Restructuring Local Universities which maps out timeline and roadmaps will be announced by the Ministry of Education within the year, requesting local universities to better position themselves and to have a clear development strategy based on competitive strengths and local demands. According to the information available, Shanghai, Shandong, Jiangsu and Tianjin have been identified to start pilot projects within this year. According to Vice Minister of Education Mrs LU Xin, 150 local universities have signed up to pilot the reform. Once the transformation is completed, China's higher education landscape will have changed towards a more skill-oriented one with around 500 academic universities, 640 UAS and 1'300 vocational colleges. Vocational education will account for 79% of the higher education institutes.
News

1. **Chinese University of Hong Kong to Establish Campus in Shenzhen**

   (CUHK, 26-03-2014)

   The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) started planning for a Shenzhen campus – The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen [CUHK(SZ)] – some five years ago, with the staunch support of Shenzhen University (SZU) and the Shenzhen Municipal Government. In October 2012, the State Ministry of Education (MoE) approved the establishment of a provisional body to take forward the planning of this collaborative initiative with SZU. Since then, the University has been working closely with relevant parties to prepare for the operations of CUHK(SZ). After all these years of thorough planning and preparation, CUHK is now pleased to receive formal MoE approval for the establishment of CUHK(SZ). With the approval, CUHK(SZ) will further implement faculty recruitment, planning and development of academic curriculum, student admission in 2014 and other key strategic plans.

   Professor Joseph J.Y. Sung, Vice-Chancellor and President of CUHK, and Chairman of the Governing Board of CUHK(SZ), said that the approval of the establishment of CUHK(SZ) by the MoE marks an important milestone in the development of CUHK. CUHK(SZ) will endeavour to train future generations of university graduates who are international in outlook, learned in the disciplines they follow, upright in character, and committed to serving the needs of society.

   Professor Xu Yangsheng, President of CUHK(SZ), said that the establishment of CUHK(SZ) is of great significance in attracting and nurturing high-calibre innovative professionals in the PRD region, in research and the exploitation of high-end technology, in enhancing academic exchange and collaboration with higher-education institutions in developed countries and regions, as well as in helping to push forward the comprehensive reform of higher education in China.

   The approved CUHK(SZ) is a non-profit-making higher education institution with the status of an independent legal entity, operating with a high degree of autonomy within the framework of the law and the CUHK(SZ) constitution. The governing body of CUHK(SZ) is its Governing Board, which comprises eight members each nominated by CUHK and SZU, and is chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and President of CUHK, who has a casting vote. Four Governing Board meetings have been held so far to formulate major policies and strategies for the development of CUHK(SZ), and to approve the University management structure, the appointments of the President and Vice-Presidents, the University mission and vision, the constitution and the emblem, etc.

   CUHK(SZ) is located in the Longgang District of Shenzhen, encompassing a campus area of around one million square metres, and will be constructed in phases. The renovation of the eight existing buildings on the site has been completed, which shall support the operational, teaching and learning activities of CUHK(SZ) in the initial years. Phase one campus development has also commenced, including the construction of major teaching blocks, the library, the university administration building, a conference centre, a student centre, colleges and staff quarters, and is expected to be completed in 2016 and 2017. A wider range of facilities and resources in the campus shall be available by then.

   There are three schools in CUHK(SZ), namely the School of Management and Economics, the School of Science and Engineering, and the School of Humanities and Social Science. Student admission will be phased, with an ultimate student population of 11,000, of whom 7,500 will be undergraduates and 3,500 postgraduates. CUHK(SZ) will first introduce three undergraduate degree programmes in fall 2014, including Marketing and Communication, Global Business Studies, and Economics, and later phase in various programmes in Science and Engineering, Management and Economics, and Humanities and Social Science, including innovative and inter-disciplinary subjects. CUHK(SZ) will draw upon CUHK’s traditions of academic excellence. No effort will be spared to ensure that the high teaching quality of CUHK is maintained at CUHK(SZ) which will become a preferred research university located in Shenzhen, firmly rooted in China, and endowed with a global vision.
Bowen stressed that the "changed global landscape" means the United States "must be more vigilant" if it wishes to remain on top. Will it? Bowen was optimistic: U.S. researchers have historically found ways of outstripping their international competitors, and the NSB official said he would "not be surprised to find out the United States does quite well in maintaining" its capacity as the world's innovation powerhouse, at least for a while longer.


2. **New Targeted Inspections in Anti-Corruption Drive**

(University World News, 28-03-2014)

China has announced a new round of inspections of science and technology departments in universities, the third 'special inspection' tour to be sanctioned by the Communist Party in recent months in its bid to clamp down on research fund embezzlement and other corrupt practices plaguing high-spending research departments.

The announcement by official media on 17 March said it would be the third round of inspections since January carried out by the party's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, or CCDI, the frontline organization for rooting out graft.

Intriguingly, the CCDI also said it would send a "special inspection team" to the science ministry itself, an indication of suspicions that embezzlement of research funds may be abetted in some cases by individuals within the authorities.

"Some officials, particularly top officials, have too much power to examine and approve projects and other affairs that could easily lead to corruption," said Zheng Fenming, Director of the Institute of Modernization Strategy at the Guangdong Academy of Social Sciences.

At the provincial level, in August 2013 Xie Xueling, Director of the Guangzhou City Bureau of Science and Information in Guangdong province in the south, was placed under investigation for taking bribes.

In another case in Foshan city in the same province, a Chuancheng District Prosecutors official said the city's Science and Technology Bureau Chief Panzhi Sen was accused of taking bribes from IT companies, Guangdong's Southern News reported.

In February this year official media revealed that Wang Kewei, Deputy Director of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Science and Technology, became the second senior official in the province to be sacked. Further details of the case were not revealed as it is still under investigation.

The director general of the same department Li Xinghua was sacked on suspicion of accepting bribes and expelled from the party in January.

At least 50 science and technology officials from the Guangdong provincial government and Guangzhou and Foshan cities have come under investigation on suspicion of violating party discipline and state laws in the past 12 months, the official China Daily reported last month.

In 2013, Communist Party inspection teams were sent to some 20 localities, government and provincial departments and state-run enterprises around the country. Official reports said the inspections had found "many leads" pointing to violations of laws and of disciplinary rules that could point to misconduct and corruption.

According to the CCDI website, the first round of inspections had identified leads on five provincial- and ministerial-level officials "suspected of serious violation of the law", and had led to the compilation of a list of issues that needed tackling.
Official media said inspection teams had tightened up their procedures to net culprits and unearth misconduct because regular inspections at specific intervals in the past had led to a general clean-up in universities ahead of the inspectors, researchers said.

In particular, inspection teams had changed their focus from a relatively broad approach with rotating inspection team leaders to more professionalized inspections that were better prepared, homed in on specific areas and personnel and were led by a senior official, according to the official *Beijing Youth Daily*.

The special inspection teams are "problem oriented", according to official statements. Unlike in the past, they can also follow up an inspection with more visits soon afterwards - considered a major deterrent for wrongdoing.

CCDI inspection team arrived at Fudan University on March 31st and will be based at the university until April 26th. During the year, the team will also go to the Ministry of Science and Technology.


3. **China Start Research on Public Diplomacy**

(ECNS.cn, 27-02-2014)

Renmin University of China founded its research institute on public diplomacy in Beijing. The opening ceremony of the institute was held on February 26th at Renmin University.

The institute, which will be headed by Zhao Qizheng, former Director of State Council Information Office, will consist of research teams from the School of Journalism and Communication, School of International Studies and the Peking Opera Research Center of the university.

The institute will carry out research on public diplomacy by the government and all kinds of social organizations and institutions.

Dai Bingguo, former State Councilor and honorary president of the newly founded institute, said at the opening ceremony that it is the first public diplomacy institute established in a Chinese university, and it was founded at the right time to meet the demand as China has been developing relations with countries around the world.

In an era of information and globalization, public diplomacy plays a unique role in opening up channels of communication beyond official diplomacy, and more studies and teaching on public diplomacy should be carried out at Chinese universities, he said.

(http://www.ecns.cn/2014/02-27/102601.shtml)
4. **China Seeks Its Own GMO Approach**

(WSJ, 7-03-2014)

China has long faced unfavorable food math: It feeds a fifth of the world’s population on a seventh of its available land—and not the world’s most fertile, Beijing often complains. So the question in global agriculture markets has often been, Why not speed up the use of genetically modified food?

Part of the answer came on March 6th. China is trying to get into the GMO market, but it is keener to develop its own technologies to meet rising agriculture demand, the country’s Agriculture Minister said at the National Parliament.

China already allows some GMO imports, including in its sensitive grain category, but not for human consumption—only as animal feed. The population remains skeptical about allowing more. The minister’s comment possibly explains why it has taken the government so long to approve the commercial distribution of GMO grains domestically—the government appears to be busy working on made-in-China technologies. (“GMO” is “genetically modified organism”—for example, corn that has had its genetic blueprint artificially re-engineered to become insect-resistant.)

The government will pursue its own research and development of genetically modified food, though it remains “cautious” on the distribution of GMO products, Agriculture Minister Han Changfu said at a press conference on Thursday. Given a lack of natural resources, he said, China has to promote scientific development to meet its grain-security needs.

“We can't have such techniques monopolized by others,” he said. Developed economies dominate GMO research, Mr. Han said, but China is catching up in some areas.

The government has stepped up a public-relations campaign that could pave the way for full approval for commercial production of these politically sensitive crops. Since last year, the Agriculture Ministry and other state agencies have been putting a positive spin on GMO foods, whether issuing statements (such as one congratulating a researcher for a cucumber breakthrough) or staging publicity events (such as a rice taste test.)

The government will step up its supervision of GMO products and crack down on any illegal production of GMO seeds, he said.

Last year China blocked an unprecedented amount of U.S. corn imports for violating its ban on certain types of genetically modified food, illustrating the difficulty big biotechnology companies face in tapping the country’s potentially vast market.

There has been a heated debate about the use of genetically modified crops, even in a country with ever-expanding food needs. An agricultural official claimed to local media that eating genetically modified soybeans increases the risk of cancer. Defense strategists have expressed concerns that reliance on foreign GMO grains food creates a strategic vulnerability.

But, Mr. Han said, some of these fears are overwrought. Asked whether he eats GMO foods, he said he does—“mostly soybeans and soybean-oil products.” And all GMOs, he declared, are under strict government supervision to ensure safety.

(http://blogs.wsj.com/chinarealtime/2014/03/07/china-seeks-its-own-gmo-food-path/)
5. **China Cracks Down on Mobile Phone Payments**

(FT.com, 14-03-2014)

China has ordered a halt to mobile phone payment systems and virtual credit cards, in a move that will slow the rapid development of online finance in the country.

Just a day after Alibaba and Tencent launched virtual credit cards, the central bank ruled that this line of business was too risky, according to state media. In an additional blow, the central bank suspended mobile phone payments that are based on users swiping barcode-like QR symbols, which can be used for buying everything from cinema tickets to beer.

The Chinese financial sector, long protected from competition by a cocoon of government regulation, has been shaken up over the past year by increasingly aggressive internet companies. Alibaba and Tencent have led the charge with online savings funds that in effect function like bank accounts and with mobile payment systems that have started to displace debit cards.

Chinese officials have so far permitted this incursion on to the banks’ turf, viewing online finance as beneficial to ordinary consumers. But banks have started to mount opposition and have called for stricter regulations.

The People’s Bank of China has ordered the temporary halt of virtual credit cards and QR payment systems, according to a statement posted on multiple websites, including the government-run Securities Times.

It said both forms of mobile finance went beyond the traditional business models of point-of-sale machines and credit cards, posing potential dangers to users.

“The level of risk control directly impacts the users’ information security and financial security,” the central bank said. The notice added that further research was needed to assess whether the virtual payment services could handle such risks.

However, analysts said the central bank may also have had another, undeclared, motive: protecting UnionPay, the government-owned bank card monopoly. The vast majority of debit and credit cards in China operate through UnionPay’s payment system, and it takes a fee from every transaction.

When payment is made via QR codes and mobile phones, analysts say, UnionPay is cut out of transactions. That means “UnionPay’s interests have been seriously harmed”, analysts with China International Capital Corp said.

The central bank’s order put the brakes on virtual credit cards before they had a chance to get started. Both Alibaba and Tencent had announced just this week that they would launch credit cards in partnership with Citic Bank.

Alibaba’s “virtual” card was to be launched next week in the Alipay Wallet app. Citic was to operate the card, but the creditworthiness of applicants was to be based solely on their online shopping histories. Tencent’s card was also to be operated by Citic Bank, but unlike Alibaba, Citic was to handle the approval process for the cards by doing traditional credit checks.

Investors had expected the cards to have an almost immediate impact on consumption habits in China, and shares in Citic Bank had jumped in anticipation of the increase in its business. But with the halt, Citic Bank’s stock dropped 8 per cent on Friday before trading was suspended.

Citic Bank appeared to be blindsided by the central bank’s decision. A spokeswoman said the bank had adhered to the correct application procedures before launching the virtual credit cards. “We will wait for further information and see what to do,” she said.
Tencent declined to discuss the PBoC order. Alibaba could not be reached for comment.

Shares in Tencent were down 3 per cent on March 14th Friday afternoon in Hong Kong, also under pressure from reports that the government had blocked some popular users from its WeChat messaging service. Tencent’s share price has more than doubled over the past year, in part a reflection of the growth in its online finance business.

(http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7709066a-ab2e-11e3-83a2-00144feab7de.html#axzz2xh0UwpI0)

6. **China Overtakes Japan in NPI Ranking**

(China Daily, 27-03-2014)

For many years, science in the Asia-Pacific region has been dominated by Japan, but China is now on pace to catch up.

China is on track to become the dominant scientific power in the Asia-Pacific region, according to the editors of the Nature Publishing Index 2013 Asia-Pacific, published on March 27th Beijing time.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences, a government agency comprising of over 100 research centers, knocked the University of Tokyo off the top of the NPI institutional rankings for the first time.

"The country has accomplished much in 2013," Nature said, considering the country's progress in scientific strength.

"The progress was from one angle a result of the country's increasing attention and investment in sciences," said Yu Shuhong, a professor with the University of Science and Technology of China.

Chinese scientists lead the way in publishing more papers in Nature journals than Japan or any other Asia-Pacific nation.

The nation's output of published papers is now the second-highest in the world, following only the United States, with its total paper citations ranking fifth-highest, following the US, Germany, the UK and Japan, according to Luo Xisheng, director of the office of science and technology at the USTC.

"Quality and total output of papers should have equal importance attached, while pursuit of more original innovation should be the main task of Chinese scientists," said Yu, who serves as an editor for several well-known Chinese and international journals.

The top 10 Chinese research institutions for NPI output were also released, with the CAS, the USTC and Tsinghua University in the first three places.

The 2013 Asia-Pacific NPI is based on publication output in Nature and 17 Nature research journals for the period from Jan 1, 2013, to Dec 31, and offers insight and analysis into the performance of all Asia-Pacific nations and territories appearing in the Index during that time.

(http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2014-03/27/content_17383960.htm)
(Collaborating Opportunities)

**Swiss Day at Tongji University**  
Date: May 23rd  
Place: Shanghai  
Contact: Swissnex China

**Swiss Universities Academic Expedition in China**  
Date: fall 2014  
Contact: Swissnex China

**Swiss Week at Shanghai**  
Date: May 29th to June 2nd  
Place: Shanghai  
Contact: Swissnex China

**China Education Expo**  
Date: October 25th to 26th  
Place: Beijing  
Contact: Embassy of Switzerland in China

**Job Vacancy: Assistant to the Science, Technology Section, Embassy of Switzerland in China**  
Place: Beijing, China  

**Job Vacancy: Communication Manager at Swissnex Boston**  
Place: Boston, UAS  
Contact: [http://swissnexboston.org/communications-manager-app](http://swissnexboston.org/communications-manager-app)