



Innovatie Attaché Shanghai

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Research Intelligence points at Asia Pacific

Summary

The Elsevier group, Times Higher Education and Fudan University hosted an international conference on research intelligence in Shanghai. University rankings were vigorously discussed.

Full message

On June 11 2015, the Times Higher Education (THE) launched this years' Asia University Ranking. On the same day, the Elsevier group, THE and Fudan University hosted an international conference on research intelligence. This event was attended by approximately 200 researchers, university management seniors and academic librarians from regions throughout Asia Pacific.

Every year, university rankings cause shivers to many deans, policy makers and alumni worldwide. Rankings have become tangible outcomes of policies and talent ladder management. They represent numbers that indicate success. The strongest contributor to a rank is publication impact. However, present day ranking is more complex than just adding the numbers. Algorithms behind rankings have become more advanced, and –at least in case of THE- take into account teaching quality, industry collaboration, international connectivity and reputation. Not quite an exact approach.

Even though the conference on June 11 and 12 was dedicated to the broader scope of academic applicability of Elsevier's knowledge base, it seemed difficult to steer the discussion away from the rankings. Rankings evoke many discussions. Questions arise such as: What is success? How to optimize your university... and its surroundings, in order to attract and keep talent? If your university is not on top, how to get there? If you are on top, how to stay there? Is the ranking true? Tongji University, for instance, did not agree with its place in the ranking. Arguing that every Shanghai citizen knows that Tongji is ranked no. 3 in Shanghai, the THE 5th position did not make sense. A hilarious though refreshing perspective on metrics and the perception of rankings.

It is nevertheless hard to ignore the impact of ranking, especially now THE clearly points towards the ascending Asian universities in the global ranking (10 universities in the top 61). This year, in the the Asia University Ranking, more Chinese universities than ever before have entered the top 100 (21). If one concludes that Asia is becoming an academic teaching hub, new challenges present themselves: how to attract and retain? For instance, more than 80% of the PhDs will leave the academy within 5 years after graduation. They may be more tempted to reside in a well-connected, innovation-rich area with a high economic potential.

As for now, the Chinese are trying hard to adapt to the challenges. More than any other Asian country, China actively explores numerous ways in order to attract talent and create a suitable professional infrastructure for talents and their (talented) family members. Other Asian countries, including Japan, have recognized the importance of adopting strategies to maximize their potential in the knowledge economy era. In Asia, universities continue to play



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a leading role in identifying challenges and providing intellectual frameworks for stepping up to the global academic arena and economic prosperity. Metrics show that unusual suspects, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, are gearing up as much as China, Japan and the Asian Tigers. The race is on in Asia.

Sources, further reading

1. <https://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/>