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Enchanted in the art works of autism children at a charity event organized by HOPE
before the World Autism Awareness Day on 2nd April

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Inside HOPE

HOPE's 2025 Annual Charity Event calls for more support to Autistic Children

HOPE International Education has been dedicated to autism-related charity initiatives for decades. Since 2012, this philanthropic effort has not only gathered sustained support from students and parents but has also established a robust network in collaboration with partner schools and universities as well as autism institutions in China.



Over 400 participants joining charity walk 2025 to support the autistic minority

On 29th of March, HOPE International Education and Shanghai Xuhui District Clover Children Autism Centre held the annual charity walk event in West Bund Natural Arts Park, dedicated to raising awareness for Autism children. The event attracted over 400 participants, including students, parents, educators, corporate representatives, and individuals from all walks of life, united to amplify the voices for autism community.



HOPE Alumni Association Team and HOPE Parents Association gathered with HOPE colleagues to support autism children

Centred on the theme of "Understanding, Acceptance, and Support," the event aimed to enhance public awareness of autism, promote social cohesiveness for special community, and mobilize broader support for autism children. By combining interactive experiences with public advocacy, the event not only deepened social understanding of autism but also fostered a more compassionate environment for the well-being of this minority groups.



**Xuan Xuan, a talented autism child kicked off the event
with drum performance**



**Participants actively joining in the Q&A interactive session
with autism children during the hiking**

The event kicked off with a drum performance by a young man with autism, whose talent and potential moved the audience and set the tone for the walk. Participants then embarked on a short hiking journey during which quiz on autism knowledge, interaction with autism children, charity sale of autism children's painting and arts work were set as tasks for each team before the end of the walk.



Group photo to mark the start of the charity walk, October 2023
Attended by senior management team of Loughborough University

Notably, HOPE's partner UK universities have also deepened their involvement in such charity events in recent years. In October 2023, Professor Rachel Thompson, Pro Vice-Chancellor of Loughborough University, led a six-member delegation, including the Director of International Affairs, to make a special visit to Shanghai Xuhui District Clover Children Autism Centre. They donated over 20,000 RMB worth of professional sports equipment and stationery as well as organized the charity hike. Over 50 of the university's alumni in China, along with representatives from ten partner companies and local institutions, walked along the Huangpu River to raise public awareness of autism. This creative initiative was later featured in an exclusive report by Shanghai Television Channel.



***Zoe Yao, U of Southampton call on creating a friendly environment
for autistic children in 2024 Charity Walk***

University of Southampton contributed in another meaningful way. Before the World Autism Awareness Day in 2024, the university sponsored 5000RMB to Shanghai Clover Children

Autism Centre for the charity walk event. These efforts not only provided tangible assistance to children with special needs but also significantly enhanced the universities' public image.



HOPE organized a charity badminton tournament to raise fund for autism children in Ningbo on 15th March

HOPE started to commit to the support for autistic children 13 years ago. Since then, a series of charity events are organized each year by HOPE and its local partners including charity cycling, charity walk, charity photo contest, charity and auction sales of autistic children's arts work etc. Last month, a charity badminton tournament was organized by HOPE in Ningbo, and students, teachers and education counsellors from local international schools competed to raise fund for a local autism rehabilitation centre, Oliver Tree Children's Development Centre.

HOPE warmly welcome more overseas institutions to join our charity events in the future. This is not only an important way to demonstrate institutions social responsibility and humanitarian commitment but also an excellent platform for international institutions to raise their profile and enhance their public branding.

The British Council's East Asia Agent Conference hear HOPE's Voice

East Asia Agent Conference organized by the British Council was held in Hong Kong University on 6th March.

Daniel Zheng, Managing Director of HOPE International Education was invited by the organizer to be one of the panelists to attend a session on: **The business of student recruitment agencies in East Asia - challenges and opportunities**. This session discussed the current trends, challenges and prospects for student recruitment Agents in East Asia in an evolving landscape where the region is no longer the leading sending countries for the UK. Panels discussed the changing market dynamics and shifting demands in key markets such as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore and emerging markets like Vietnam and Indonesia including the impact of regulatory landscape, digital transformation, economic and cultural considerations and the changing roles of student recruitment agents.



The followings are Daniel's brief reply to the panel questions:

Markets

1. Will the downward shift in some key markets persist?

Up to around 2015-16, enrolment of students in the UK from key markets were on a continual rise. Since then, while recruitment to the UK from East Asia as a whole has still managed to grow for the most part, with China cushioning declines elsewhere, recruitment from key markets including Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have fallen significantly from their

2015-16 and/or pre-Covid highs. What do you think are the main factors contributing to this change and do you see this as a temporary or more permanent shift?

Daniel:

1. The decline in China market was not obvious before Covid-19, even, 2018-2020 saw some increase as a whole (UG+PG), probably because the demand from international school and less competitive from other countries. The economy in China was still quite strong and families were less price sensitive.

2. Covid-19 was really a turning point which weakened some advantage of studying in the UK:

- Safety and long distance to travel
- Economic downward vs Tuition fee increase
- Difficulty on job market - value for money/cost effectiveness of big investment
- Chinese students' pursuit of top-ranking (QS top 100) universities.
- Perception of UK education - some low quality programmes/students
- Competitors thrive to meet the market demand (diversified destinations): Singapore, Malaysia, HK, Australia, and domestic joint programmes (4+0,3+1, 2+2)
- Government policy to regulate international school market and in favour of state school
- will lower the UG number in the coming years; lower birth rate means shrinking market

Some are temporary, but some maybe more long term, universities and agent need a joint effort to change it.

Recruitment Trends

2. Are key markets still worth it?

Are these key markets, those that are experiencing declines in student enrolment still worth pursuing and investing in? Amid limited resources, are they worth being put aside for the sake of emerging markets like Vietnam and Indonesia? Do you think emerging markets could reach the scale of these key markets over the next 10 years? What can the UK do to help these key (declining) markets bounce back? How do recruitment trends differ across East Asia (e.g., China vs. Southeast Asia)? What are the key factors driving these changes and trends in student recruitment?

Daniel:

1. For China market, I don't think overseas universities can simple neglect it due to its size. On the contrary, it is a good time to think, recall, change and set up long term and sustainable strategy to recover in the market. Long term strategy can include: more partnership; healthy and long- term relationship with key agents; re-build image and profile on the market; improve service for students' career development; more scholarship but use it wisely; working with alumni and industry.

2. China market is no longer a simple cash cow if you do not investment.
3. A 4-5 year up and down recruitment circle. No one can be at top all the time, nor at the bottom! Need to be optimistic as well!

Intra-Regional Competitors

3. Is intra-regional mobility a real threat?

Regional study destinations are becoming increasingly attractive to students from East Asia from a cost and value-for-money perspective. Universities within the region are moving up the ranks and many countries within the region – China, South Korea, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Singapore – already are or are pushing to become regional education hubs. Are these countries ‘real competitors?’ What do these study destinations still lack and what can students still gain from a UK education that they would not be able to gain elsewhere?

Daniel:

They are real competitors, including some UK institutions’ Asian campuses.

They lack: authentic English and British culture environment; real challenges for students benefits;

Accessibility of UK Education

4. Is a UK education becoming a luxury good?

If studying in the UK could only be afforded by the middle-class in past generations, elevated prices, stubborn inflation, currency fluctuations, low wage growth and economic slowdowns post-Covid has now made it accessible to only the upper-middle class or perhaps even the ultra-wealthy from this region. These economic challenges do not appear to be abating anytime soon. What steps can be taken to prevent the UK from becoming increasingly out of reach amid fee increases and economic challenges faced by students?

Daniel:

1. More scholarship for top students and proper use of it.
2. More career services support leading to more internship and job opportunities in the UK and back at home.



Attractiveness of the UK

5. Is the UK's cultural influence declining?

Has the UK been realistic in assessing the cultural perceptions of international students towards the UK as a study destination or has it over-estimated its value and appeal to the current generation of youths (Gen-Z, to be joined soon by Gen-Alpha) and parents (Millennials and Gen-X)? Share some key differences towards international education and how the UK is perceived between Millennials and Gen-X parents and Baby Boomer parents and how these will impact the study abroad decisions of their children? What are the primary motivations for students in East Asia to choose the UK for their higher education?

Daniel:

Cultural influence on students very much depends on UK's overall education quality, its global status, and institutions' globalization. High quality courses always come first!

Main motivation: safety, short study time, immigration policy (easy for visa), PSW, English and cultural environment, fame and recognition of top universities

The Agent Business

6. Do agents need an overhaul?

What are the most pressing challenges faced by student recruitment agents in East Asia today? (ie: What are the factors challenging the agent business?) How are agents addressing these challenges? What do you see are the evolving roles of agents in the student application journey? What other skill sets do agents need to grow and sustain their business? How can UK universities and recruitment agents collaborate more effectively to overcome challenges and seize opportunities in the region? Why would students use agents given that information is easily available and application process are fairly straight forward?

Daniel:

Most pressing challenges for agents: 1) frequently changing market demand; 2) frequently changing country and institution policy; 3) changing and more demanding requirement from UK institutions for recruitment number only;

Agent business needs to be diversified. HOPE is now much more than just an agent!

A healthy and sustainable agent-university relation highly required, each agents has its own different strength, and a wise use of each agent's resource can be a challenge to UK institutions if the communication between the two parties are not systematic and strategic.

7. Can agents be the connector between universities, industry and alumni?

Amid stiff competition, could agents look into providing a more integrated service beyond just helping students with decisions on where and which institutions to apply to, and instead, expand their services into connecting returning students with internship or employment opportunities? Could agents be the connector between universities, industry and alumni and bring about the increased engagement between these sectors that is so lacking currently?

Daniel:

Definitely! Agents can help organize alumni to share their study, living and career experience with potential students; Current students can be as promotion ambassador via online and in person events organized by agents; Agent can assist with local industry visit. Agent can help organize subject related master/demo classes in local international schools! These are all what HOPE has been doing!

INSIDE HOPE --- Photo news of

March



On 5th of March, HOPE International Education and Hong Kong Financial Services Institute held a strategic cooperation signing ceremony in Hong Kong. The two parties will apply their respective strengths to cooperate in fields such as study tours, STEM education, media and financial training, teacher development and overseas study programs.



On 12th of March, HOPE counsellors were invited to attend British Council agent annual conference in Shanghai. During the event, the latest information about overseas studies were released. The event also highlighted trends and opportunities related to employment for international students, offering practical advice to international students on how to navigate the global job market and enhance career prospects.



On the 13th and 14th of March, accompanied by HOPE colleagues, Mark Launder, Principal, and David Giles, International Director of Strathallan School Scotland, embarked on a visit to its sister schools in Shanghai and Hefei respectively, further strengthening the links with its Chinese partners. The delegation from Strathallan was warmly welcomed by both schools, where they were greeted with enthusiasm and hospitality by students. During their visit, they participated in a variety of activities, particularly those showcasing the richness of Chinese traditional culture.



Visit from St. Andrew's School US on 28th March. Visit from Strathallan School 15th (up) and Scarborough School 19th



Visit from Mount Roskill Grammar School from New Zealand on 27th March

In March, the HOPE Shanghai office received visits from several overseas schools from UK, USA and New Zealand. The schools, renowned for their global standing and educational excellence, engaged in discussions with HOPE for further and closer collaboration on recruitment as well as meeting with potential students and parents.

News from local media

Intl exhibition to open more doors for students seeking overseas education

By ZHAO YIMENG | chinadaily.com.cn | Updated: 2025-03-25 18:48

The 2025 China International Education Exhibition Tour will be held from April 11 to 20, featuring diverse participants and customized activities to meet the needs of Chinese students seeking overseas studies, according to the organizer.

Wang Daquan, director-general of Chinese Service Center for Scholarly Exchange of the Ministry of Education, said CIEET 2025 will be held in Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan in Hubei province, and Guangzhou in Guangdong province.

As of March 24, the exhibition has attracted 246 universities and educational institutions from 24 countries and regions, with nearly 450 registered exhibition pavilions.

In addition to traditional study destinations such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, this year's exhibition has also attracted institutions from countries such as Ecuador, Kazakhstan, Hungary, Poland, and Vietnam, Wang said.

During the exhibition, a series of lectures will offer on-site consultation on topics of high interest to students, including overseas academic degree certification, as well as employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for returning students, he added.

Alongside this event, the China Study Abroad Forum will also be convened in Beijing on April 11. The forum will be themed on Quality, Trust, and Safety: for the Sustainable Development of International Education.

Several reports will be released for the first time, including the overseas credential evaluation report, the blue book on Chinese students studying abroad, and the analysis report on employment trends of returning Chinese students.

Experts highlight areas open for China-US cooperation

By ZHOU JIN | chinadaily.com.cn | Updated: 2025-03-22 20:40

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202503/22/WS67deafada310c240449dc50c.html>

Despite the unclear and uncertain picture of the current China-US relations, observers have emphasized the opportunities where the two countries could make a deal and advance cooperation.

At a panel themed at "China-US relations: Is a 'grand bargain' possible?" on Friday during the 7th International Forum on Security and Strategy held by Tsinghua University, observers explored areas where the two sides could have more engagement and cooperation despite the US ramping up tariffs on Chinese goods and taking more protectionist measures.

Susan Thornton, former acting assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, said there are going to be some opportunities potentially to improve things under the new US government and there are a lot of areas the US President Donald Trump has hinted at that he's interested in.

"We should keep our minds open for possibilities that things could be pursued that would constitute progress and could set a firmer foundation for (US-China) relations going forward," said Thornton, who is also a senior fellow of Paul Tsai China Center at Yale Law School.

She is also optimistic about people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

There are a lot of people in the US that are very dedicated to making sure that such exchanges continues, she said.

Citing education exchanges, Thornton said that right now, the US-China student exchanges are quite healthy and still much desired by universities across the US.

According to her, there are over 200,000 Chinese students studying in the US.

"There's a lot of enthusiasm for hosting Chinese students at the university level and high school level and even below that," she said, adding that she thinks it's extremely important to keep these such exchanges going.

Zhao Minghao, a professor at the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, listed areas where the two countries could explore potential for cooperation, including economy and trade, law enforcement on the fentanyl issue, artificial intelligence development as well as sub-national cooperation.

Regarding the fentanyl issue, Zhao said that Washington suffers from a severe information deficit as few people in the US have access to the information on the achievements of China in addressing the issue.

The root cause of the fentanyl problem lies within the US, and it is a perception gap for the US to baselessly accuse China, which cannot be accepted, Zhao said.

He also emphasized the importance of bilateral cooperation on drug control and law enforcement. If the US can bridge the information gap, the two countries can still achieve better cooperation through more effective mechanisms, he said.

Sun Yun, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center in Washington, said that the "bargain" between China and the US could happen at a lower or secondary level.

For example, she said, the two countries could work together to resolve regional hot spot issues like the Iranian nuclear issue.

Sun believes that cooperation at societal level and between the two peoples will not only survive but also thrive.

Better-paying jobs can ignite students' passion for STEM

By Kang Bing | China Daily | Updated: 2025-03-25 07:38

<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202503/25/WS67e1ed00a3101d4e4dc2a940.html>



College students interact with a soccer robot during a science fair at Southeast University in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, in October. YANG BO/CHINA NEWS SERVICE

While taking a walk after a late lunch to get some exercise and to enjoy the winter sun, I noticed the middle school in my community had changed its name. For many years, it was named after the university it was affiliated with. Now it's called Science and Technology Branch of Beijing Middle School — considered by many to be the best senior high school in my district.

The neighborhood should be happy after finally getting a "good school". But what caught my attention were two Chinese characters in the name, ke ji, which mean science and technology. They indicated the school, apart from having the required curriculum, will focus more on teaching science and technology.

On checking further, I found out the new school is part of my district's efforts to promote science and technology education. The school is to be guided jointly by the Beijing Middle School Educational Group and five nearby universities. Being a branch of the district's "best school", it should impart high-quality education, with the five universities giving students

access to their labs and arranging for lectures by their professors. The target is to rear talents interested in science and technology.

Determined to build the country into an innovation-driven economy, the Chinese leadership is leaving no stone unturned to lure talents to the science and technology sector. The central and provincial governments have been holding annual award ceremonies for scientists and engineers to acknowledge their contributions to the development of the country. Attractive bonuses are being offered, and special treatments in housing and healthcare provided to top-notch scientists, in an effort to popularize science education even in primary schools. More important, the central government has been increasing the budget for science and technology from year to year.

Such efforts are being made to ensure more and more students become interested in science and technology.

During my generation more than four decades ago, more than 70 percent of university students majored in science and technology. At that time, if one asked primary school students what their career dreams were, 90 percent were likely to say their dream was "to become a scientist or an engineer". Now the answers vary, with many kids choosing disciplines that will earn them more money.

Statistics from 2019 show that in China, about 45 to 48 percent university students majored in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) with the rest doing so in the liberal arts. Although China still ranks higher in terms of STEM college graduates than the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom and France — all below 40 percent — the rapid decrease in the number of STEM students should be worrying.

Given the importance of the advancement of science and demand for engineers to support China's huge manufacturing sector, the country requires more scientists and engineers. Some observers say the decreasing number of STEM graduates is the result of the unsatisfactory teaching quality in universities, the shortage of cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary courses, inefficient guidance in selection of majors and some professors' inability to make courses interesting.

There may be many other reasons for the decline in the number of STEM graduates. But, to me, the best solution is to take measures to make jobs for STEM college graduates more respectable and better paying.

Only a small percentage of STEM college graduates can land a good job in a big company or university or get a chance to conduct research. Others have to forget about their majors and compete with the liberal arts and commerce graduates for jobs in the sales, marketing or civil service sectors.

Many workshops and construction sites are short of engineers, but their poor working condition and unsatisfactory pay stop many STEM college graduates from taking up such jobs.

Scientists and engineers should be accorded more respect and given better pay as recognition for their contribution to the country's development or to encourage them to build the country into an innovation-driven economy. Only when these steps are taken can STEM become more popular, and the country be able to get more talents in science and technology — and my community school have a better chance of attracting talented teenagers.

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Chinese universities boost, broaden AI courses amid tech boom

Xinhua | Updated: 2025-03-25 11:04

BELJING -- A course on large language models and generative AI at China's elite Tsinghua University in Beijing has become very popular this new semester. One student even described it on social media as being "crazier than the Spring Festival travel rush."

A classroom hosting this course was packed beyond capacity, with doorways, aisles, steps and even the space immediately outside filled with eager learners, some of whom stood for the entire two-hour session just to be part of it.

This frenzy came after Tsinghua's launch of a program for all graduate students to boost AI skills, part of a broader national push to cultivate talent in cutting-edge fields amid rapid technological advancements.

AI, notably, is no longer confined to science and engineering -- it has become a general education subject for students across disciplines.

"The integration of AI into university general education signifies that it has evolved into a universal technology for learning, researching and working," said Wu Fei, director of the Institute of Artificial Intelligence of Zhejiang University in East China. "Mastering the use of AI is now a skill that everyone should acquire."

In 2023, China's Ministry of Education laid out a plan for optimizing emerging disciplines by 2025, in a quest to keep in touch with new technologies, emerging sectors and new business modes.

The recent government work report also emphasizes efforts to expand quality undergraduate education and accelerate the development of world-class universities and academic disciplines.

Accordingly, leading Chinese universities such as Tsinghua University, Wuhan University and Shanghai Jiao Tong University have announced plans to expand their enrollments in AI and related interdisciplinary fields to meet growing demands.

Medicine is one of the most closely integrated disciplines. Shanghai Medical College of Fudan University currently offers over 20 AI-related courses, which cover both essential computer theories and practical applications.

"Deep Learning in Medical Imaging" is one such course. The teaching team for this course consists of professors with backgrounds in biomedical engineering, who deeply understand the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration.

"AI is a highly specialized field. Without systematic learning, it would be extremely challenging for medical students to study it on their own," said Song Zhijian, the course director and a professor from the School of Basic Medical Sciences at Fudan.

"After finishing each section, the programming instructors consistently verify whether we had grasped the content," said Song Jiahao, an undergraduate who started his university studies in 2023. This student is currently working on a research project related to angiography, also known as radiography of blood vessels, which involves using image processing software and selecting appropriate images to train AI models.

"We will promote the deep integration of medicine and AI through interdisciplinary education -- including the introduction of a smart medicine major in medical schools," said Zhu Tongyu, vice-president of the medical college, adding that the smart medicine program has been added to the list of Shanghai's top 10 future disciplines.

While enhancing AI education, Chinese universities also place great emphasis on collaborating with industries and enterprises. For instance, Nanjing University in East China's Jiangsu province has worked closely with leading tech enterprises, such as Baidu and Huawei, to jointly develop intelligent tools that support AI-based teaching and assessment.

Chengdu-based Southwest Jiaotong University in Southwest China's Sichuan province, meanwhile, has partnered with Amazon, JD.com and other companies in designing AI courses to enhance the practical skills of students. The university has also established a training system for top-tier AI talent, spanning undergraduate to doctoral levels.

China's long-term vision for education was reinforced in January with the unveiling of a master plan concerning building the country into a leading nation in terms of education by 2035.

"DeepSeek and robotics represent China's achievements in technological innovation and talent cultivation, while also placing new demands on our education development and talent training," said China's Minister of Education Huai Jinpeng.

The need is clear -- job postings for drone engineers, algorithm engineers and machine learning positions saw a year-on-year increase of about 40 percent in February, according to a survey by Zhaopin, an online recruitment platform in China. Industry reports indicate that by 2030, China is likely to face a shortage of 4 million AI professionals.

Experts believe that fostering collaboration between universities and enterprises is key to bridging the gap between talent development levels and enterprise needs -- while also enhancing university research via enterprise technology.

"Higher education in any country is a valuable resource for national strategy," Huai said, adding that more efforts will be made to incorporate key fields, such as AI and biotechnology, to better align with national strategies and technological development.