

# Look what the Chinese are up to now

China aims to be a nation of many Harvards

**Howard W French**

Shanghai

China wants to transform its top universities into the world's best within a decade, and it is spending billions of dollars to woo big-name scholars and build first-class research laboratories.

The effort is China's latest bid to raise its profile as a great power.

China has already pulled off one of the most remarkable expansions of education in modern times, increasing the number of undergraduates and people who hold doctoral

degrees fivefold in 10 years. In only a generation, the country has increased the proportion of its college-age population in higher education to roughly 20 per cent now from 1.4 per cent in 1978.

China's model is simple: recruit top foreign-trained Chinese and Chinese-American specialists, set them up in well-equipped labs, surround them with the brightest students, and give them a lot of leeway.

China is focusing on science and technology, areas that reflect the country's development needs as well as the preferences of an authoritarian system that restricts speech. The liberal arts often involve critical thinking about politics, economics, and history. In fact,

## Meanwhile in the US

While world-class education is next on China's agenda, in the US Chinese seems to be the future of foreign-language studies:

■ The defence department has given \$700,000 to schools in Portland, Oregon, to double the

numbers studying Chinese

■ A bill proposing to spend \$1.3 billion over five years on Chinese programmes introduced in May

■ Govt will spend \$1.35 million on advanced placement classes in high schools from next year

the Chinese say that those very restrictions could hamper efforts to create world-class universities.

Nonetheless, the new confidence about entering the world's educational elite is heard among politicians and university administrators, students and professors.

"Maybe in 20 years MIT will be

studying Qinghua's example," says Rao Zihe, director of Institute of Biophysics at Qinghua University, an institution renowned for its sciences and often regarded as China's finest. "You can't predict how long it will take to catch up but in some respects we are already better."

SMS FP05 <ur view> to 9833489453

