Education

Zhejiang University
Steeped in learning

No city guide about Oxford or Cambridge could avoid discussion of their universities. The same is true of Hangzhou, a city famed within China for its educational pedigree. There are 38 institutes of higher education in Hangzhou, and an additional 11 vocational colleges. Pride of place goes to Zhejiang University, which enjoys Ivy League status within China.

Hangzhou’s vast education system draws bright people in from the surrounding areas and channels them back into the city, keeping the talent pool fresh. Many graduates choose to stay in Hangzhou, meaning local businesses have access to a steady stream of young recruits, supporting the property market with rounds of new buyers.

Hangzhou’s educational excellence aside, another dimension is the willingness of young Hangzhouers to study abroad. This is often offered as an explanation for the city’s “openness” to new ideas and foreign concepts.

Over 100 companies in Hangzhou specialise in providing support and assistance for students travelling overseas to study. In 2014, close to 14,000 privately-funded students went to study abroad – 75% of them for Bachelor’s or Master’s degrees. This was a 10% increase on the year before, and the figure continues to grow each year.

Moreover, in recent years the city government established a fund to provide scholarships for students of local universities or colleges seeking the chance to study abroad. That said, the government is also keen on enticing overseas students back, recognising its ‘sea turtles’ (Chinese slang for skilled and highly educated returning nationals) as one of the major stimuli to Hangzhou’s workforce.

That said, the municipal government is eager to expand the international standing of its own educational facilities, as detailed in its plan for the “globalisation of the
A student poses for pictures near a statue of Mao Zedong at Zhejiang University.
Zhejiang University

Zhejiang University has several campuses in Hangzhou, mostly situated in the West Lake district. The university is ranked highest in Zhejiang province, and one of the top 10 universities in China.

Founded in 1897 as Qiushi Academy, the university’s evolution over the past century or so has been almost as tumultuous as that of China itself. The university’s name has changed many times and even its location shifted twice during the war with Japan. It effectively moved to Guizhou, following the Nationalist government, which had fled to Chongqing. It returned to Hangzhou in 1946 and in 1998 Zhejiang University merged with three other institutions to increase its scale.

In 2014 Zhejiang University had 46,364 full-time students, of whom 13,952 were at a postgraduate level and 8,779 were pursuing doctorates. The majority of that year’s intake, at both Bachelor’s and Master’s degree level, were studying science and engineering. There were an additional 5,746 international students and 49,236 students sitting adult learning courses.

The university prides itself on its research programmes, committing over Rmb3.12 billion ($486 million) to funding research in 2014. Its dedication to the field is enshrined in the university motto: ‘Seeking the Truth and Pioneering New Trails’.
education system”. The 2014 plan stresses the need to promote “international exchange programmes for students and teachers; overseas training and research for professors; and incentives to attract overseas talent and collaborative institutions between Chinese and foreign partners” to name but a few of the goals.

Indeed, as early as 2011 the local authorities announced plans to allow foreign investment into local education. One interesting initiative was the decision by Chinese International School (CIS), a top Hong Kong school, to establish a campus in the city. CIS sends its students to spend a year boarding there and Hangzhou was chosen from 20 shortlisted locations in China. The headmaster of the Hangzhou campus Richard Pratt says it was “a sensationally good choice” thanks to the city’s size and cultural richness (for more, see page 88).

There are also a number of other means available for people from overseas to go and study in Hangzhou. In 2014, there were 23,000 foreign students studying in the city, from 171 countries. 😊
My year in Hangzhou

A couple of years ago one of Hong Kong's top schools CIS (Chinese International School) opened a campus in Hangzhou, where its Year 10 students (aged around 14) now spend a year immersed in Chinese culture. CIS student Isabella Boyne writes here of her year in Hangzhou and the city's appeal.

Hangzhou was a place that honestly, I had never heard of. It's not like Shanghai or Beijing, the kind of place that people think of as soon as the word 'China' pops up, although it is in fact only a 45 minute train ride from Shanghai. Despite this, Hangzhou is still very much a culture and business hub, much like these better known cities. For example, Alibaba, an e-commerce company is based in Hangzhou, making Hangzhou home to various photo shoots that I witnessed, and the home to Taobao, a cheaper version of Amazon that ships items in a matter of days.

In terms of Hangzhou as a cultural hub, I was able to go see some of the Chinese operas that are often watched by the locals too! The two operas that I was able to see were the Butterfly Lovers and Madame White Snake at the Huanglongdong Yuanyuan Folk Park. They were both presented in the traditional Chinese Opera style in front of a small audience, and were performed multiple times a day.

Aside from the opera, the parks in the Huanglongdong area (Huang Long Cave) are full of greenery and very beautiful. Hangzhou people are interesting and friendly. They are all willing to talk and help you get around, as well as being very open about their lives, as I discovered when having to interview Hangzhouers. I also went to a homestay, where I lived with local people of Hangzhou over multiple weekends throughout the year. I couldn’t have hoped for more considerate or kind people to stay with.

I think that perhaps my personal favourite part of Hangzhou was the food. The food is so diverse, and my friends and I would always go out for Korean barbecue. However, the local food is just as delicious as the international cuisine. There are so many small local restaurants, such as the one owned by two people that I came to know as ‘soup guy’ and ‘soup lady’. I ate there on weekends, having fried rice, egg soup, fried noodles and spicy nian gao, discs made
of glutinous rice, paired with meat in a spicy sauce.

The local snack that I looked forward to eating was something called shao bing which is a Chinese flat pancake that can either be savoury (with meat) or sweet, with white sugar. My friends and I probably ordered a lot more than we should have.

There are so many wonderful things about Hangzhou that it is often difficult to think of any problems there. I think that the main issue for foreigners travelling to Hangzhou would be that the number of people who speak English is very limited, so it may be difficult to get around. However, a quick Google search and talking to some people I knew in Hangzhou helped me easily find wherever I wanted to go.

Overall, Hangzhou is a beautiful city with so much diversity. I would definitely recommend for people to go and visit because there are so many things to do and see – from lakes to old villages – it truly is a wonderful place.
The Leeds-Zhejiang Partnership

In 2014 the University of Leeds Business School (LUBS) in the UK and the Zhejiang University School of Management formed a partnership dedicated to research into innovation, management, and entrepreneurship. Sinopolis spoke briefly with the respective deans of the two schools, Professor Peter Moizer and Professor Wu Xiaobo:

What makes Zhejiang University an ideal partner for research in this field?

Moizer: Well it’s the quality of the staff and the location. In Hangzhou there’s lots of entrepreneurial activity and Zhejiang University has some really high quality researchers in that area. For us, we just won Entrepreneurial University of the Year from The Times Higher Education Awards, so for Leeds to work with Zhejiang University makes a lot of sense because we’re both passionate about working with entrepreneurs.

What are some of the projects that you’re working on together?

Wu: Actually we have already been collaborating together for some years especially for international business and innovation studies. We saw that Leeds University is very strong in the area of international business and also of innovation, and now we see that they are leading in entrepreneurship, especially since they won this very fine award. So we saw that the two universities can have a lot of synergy. Also Leeds and Hangzhou are twin cities, and twin cities have very strong links.

Moizer: And in terms of specific projects, the university of Leeds has done work on the best place in China for UK industry to do business. Of course, Hangzhou came out as one of the best places for the British to invest.

What’s unique about Chinese entrepreneurship and more importantly Hangzhou entrepreneurship?

Wu: I think the basic sense of entrepreneurship is the same but entrepreneurship has a very strong contextual link. So in China, especially Hangzhou you could say ‘play fast and catch up’ is the model for the entrepreneurs, because now we see more and more innovators and entrepreneurs rising,
especially down in the university institutes.

What benefits does LUBS expect its students to derive from studying in Hangzhou?

Moizer: Well, it’s the simple thing of seeing another world, another way of doing things. Also clearly China is still one of the world’s fastest growing economies and entrepreneurship is at the heart of that, and so to be there and to see it gives you a different view on the world.

What correlation does Zhejiang University see between studying abroad and entrepreneurial spirit?

Wu: For many years we’ve sent our students abroad, to my university’s partner universities. Especially when my students get to Leeds, they learn a lot: seeing how people in the UK are conducting business, especially in terms of start-ups. There’s something different about it, so we can say that the students gain some new knowledge of entrepreneurship, and they can combine those understandings with their own enterprises in China when they come back.

Leeds Business School

So this partnership has helped exchange teaching ideas between the two universities as well?

Wu: Already several faculty members from Leeds came to my university, and did some teaching. It helped us a lot to see the difference in teaching styles. Their teaching styles are more interactive; as for us, we can say that we pay more attention to teaching contextually. So we think that if the faculty members can interact together and share their understanding and knowledge of business, it will be a mutual advantage.
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