



Student recruitment from China: Challenges and opportunities



STINT

Stiftelsen för internationalisering av
högre utbildning och forskning

The Swedish Foundation for International
Cooperation in Research and Higher Education

R 19:02
ISSN 1404-7209

Preface

The mission of the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education (STINT) is to internationalise Swedish higher education and research. STINT promotes knowledge and competence development within internationalisation and invests in internationalisation projects proposed by researchers, educators and leaderships at Swedish universities. In 2018, STINT initiated a programme aimed at trend analysis in China, including sharing knowledge of matters pertinent to Swedish universities' activities abroad.

This report, authored by Mr Johan Gunnarsson, International Marketing Manager at Lund University, focuses on student recruitment from China. Students from China make up the largest group of foreign students globally. Each year over 600 000 students from China travel abroad to study. Most of these students study in countries where the first language is English, such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. The students provide a source of income for the receiving universities, as well as opportunities for local students and faculty to enrich their knowledge of the Chinese educational system and culture.

Chinese students are the largest group of foreign students in Sweden. However, in comparison to the English-speaking countries, Sweden lags far behind in terms of students from China. The recruitment activities aim to increase the number of Chinese students in Sweden, as well as to find students who can successfully complete a Swedish tertiary educational programme.

As Sweden is a fairly small country, there is the potential to coordinate Swedish universities with respect to recruitment activities and to share good practices. The first part of the report presents some general opportunities and challenges related to student recruitment in China. The second part of the report discusses some of the recruitment practices used by Lund University, one of the universities with the largest number of Chinese students in Sweden.

Dr Tommy Shih, China Policy Advisor and Programme Manager, STINT, and Dr Erik Forsberg, Representative in China, STINT, are the editors of STINT's reports on China.

*Andreas Göthenberg
Executive Director
STINT*

Stockholm, Sweden, March 2019

1. Introduction

Chinese students comprise one of the largest groups of international programme students in Sweden, although there are fewer applicants (2 671) than from countries such as India (5 964), Bangladesh (4 557), Pakistan (3 705) and Nigeria (2 759). However, Chinese applicants compensate for this in a number of different ways: they apply to more disciplines than many other groups do, a large part of Chinese applicants submit complete applications and pay application fees, and they are less dependent on scholarships for financing their studies. In addition, many of the Chinese students who study abroad are academically very capable.

All of this means that recruiting universities around the world regard Chinese students as an attractive group. Chinese students are aware of this, and this affects their behaviour at the application stage, when they frequently “shop around” to find the best alternative. They often apply to various universities in several countries and then take the best available offer.

Chinese students to a very great extent apply to traditional countries such as the USA, Australia and the UK, and many do not regard other countries as viable alternatives. Although most Chinese know about Sweden, the country is not generally associated with higher education. Swedish universities are usually better known for their research than for education, so although Chinese academics as a rule are familiar with, for example, Lund University, the brand is not generally known among (younger) students who are preparing to study abroad.

Some Chinese students who come to Sweden have an existing connection to the country. Students may have been in Sweden (or a neighbouring country) on an exchange, while some have relatives or friends here. Others are perhaps generally interested in Sweden or the Nordic region and have gathered information on studying in Sweden themselves. In addition, many plan on staying in Sweden after their studies to obtain work experience – returning home with only a degree from a foreign university is now by many regarded as a bit of a personal failure, as this no longer guarantees attractive job offers.

Naturally, Sweden was a much more attractive destination for Chinese students before the 2011 introduction of tuition fees for students from outside Europe. Lund University for example lost 75% of master-level applicants from China between 2010 (the last year without tuition fees) and 2011 (when tuition fees were introduced). Applications to some universities have since increased, such as Lund University and KTH Royal Institute of Technology, but nationally

growth is slow, and the annual number of Chinese applicants remains stubbornly at the same level as in 2013, with around 2 500 individual applicants/year.

This report presents the current recruitment situation for Chinese students at international and national levels, and includes exemplified data and conclusions from Lund University.

2. Chinese students abroad

The number of Chinese students studying abroad has increased by around 30% between 2011–2017, according to figures collected and published by UNESCO²:

Outbound internationally mobile students by host region

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
China	656 205	701 393	719 202	768 278	818 803	847 046	847 259

Nevertheless, the number of Chinese students choosing to study in Sweden has decreased during the same period (see below). There are similar trends in the Netherlands and Denmark during the same period, while the greatest winners are the traditionally largest markets (the USA, Australia, the UK and Canada)³:

Inbound internationally mobile students by country of origin (China)

Country	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Sweden	4 070	3 246	2 547	2 373	2 337	2 418	-
Netherlands	3 068	4 638	-	4 717	4 804	-	-
Denmark	1 078	915	1 204	1 168	1 116	1 285	-
Germany	-	-	19 441	21 886	23 616	-	-
UK	65 906	76 913	81 776	86 204	91 518	89 318	-
Australia	90 175	87 497	87 980	90 245	97 387	112 329	-
Canada	26 238	34 602	42 011	50 031	54 660	60 936	-
USA	178 890	210 452	225 474	260 914	291 063	309 837	-

In addition, a considerable number of Chinese students go to countries in the region. For instance, the largest recipient countries (Japan and Korea) together received more than 100 000 Chinese students in 2016. Other large recipients are Hong Kong, Macau, Malaysia and Thailand (UNESCO does not include data for Singapore or Taiwan, two other presumably large recipient countries).

¹ Figures from Nya (Feb. 6, 2018)

² <http://data.uis.unesco.org/Index.aspx?queryId=172>

³ During 2018, the USA's policy towards China changed and this has also affected the country's receipt of Chinese students.

There are different reasons why Sweden does not show the same positive development as a destination as many other countries do. The main reason is that Sweden has gone from being a country offering free education, to a country where it costs as much to study (or more, in the case of Germany) than in alternatives deemed equivalent. Potential students may still be aware of the fact that Sweden used to offer free education, and this could dampen their interest in applying to Swedish higher education institutions.

In addition, Sweden does not offer the lucrative financial incentives paid to agents and receiving higher education institutions that may largely explain the intensive traffic to Anglo-Saxon countries.

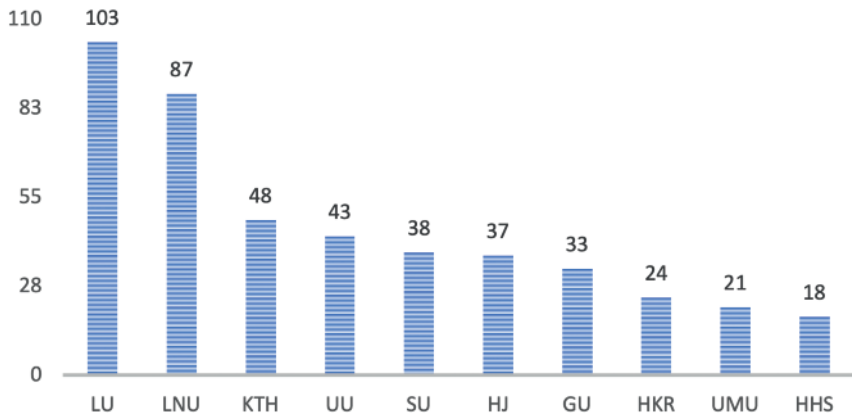
2.1 Swedish universities and Chinese students

KTH Royal Institute of Technology is the Swedish higher education institution that recruits most Chinese students, followed by Lund University, Chalmers University of Technology, Uppsala University, Stockholm University and the University of Gothenburg. Ranking, prestige and career opportunities for graduates are usually regarded as the most important factors determining where Chinese students choose to study.

KTH Royal Institute of Technology is particularly high regarded in China, and the university works closely with Chinese partner universities in recruitment. Chinese parents and students frequently regard investment in an engineering degree as a fairly safe choice for a future career, which means that the conversion rate for engineering programmes often is higher than for many other disciplines. Of the comprehensive universities in Sweden, Lund University is the most popular destination among Chinese students, followed by Uppsala University, Stockholm University and the University of Gothenburg as closest competitors. Lund University's ranking, history and broad offering of international master programmes are usually highlighted as the university's main assets. The drawback to being comprehensive is that prospective students often have trouble identifying the "best" disciplines – something which more often leads to questions in China than in other countries.

The Swedish national admissions system allows students to apply to up to four study programmes, either at the same university, or at up to four different universities, and the programmes must be ranked in order of preference upon application. Students whose first choice is a programme at KTH Royal Institute of Technology frequently list a programme at Chalmers University of Technology as second choice, which means that Chalmers climbs in the application statistics. The same phenomenon occurs at all higher education institutions that offer similar programmes.

Applicants with Chinese qualifications, autumn semester 2018 (Top 10)⁴



Undergraduate study opportunities in China are in principle completely determined by prospective students' results in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination – usually referred to as “高考 (gaokao)”. Usually, excellent results are required for acceptance at one of the prestigious Chinese universities (especially universities included in the Project 985 or Project 211 programmes, or the newer Double First Class University Plan⁵). Students who fail to do well in the gaokao (or who choose not to study in China for other reasons) often apply to universities abroad. Only a fraction of these students comes to Sweden.

The main reasons why there are not more Chinese students applying to undergraduate study programmes in Sweden is the generally scant selection of international programmes, as well as the fact that no conditional admittance is offered to undergraduate programmes. This means that Chinese students in their final year of high school cannot apply to Swedish programmes during the same year that they graduate from high school. In practice, students from outside Europe therefore have to be willing to wait an academic year between completing their schooling in their home countries and starting to study in Sweden.

⁴ Figures from NyA (Feb. 2, 2018)

⁵ http://www.moe.gov.cn/srcsite/A22/moe_843/201709/t20170921_314942.html

In some cases, the entrance requirements for bachelor programmes can also lead to difficulties. UHR assesses,⁶ for example, that Chinese students do not automatically have the required levels of mathematics and physics for bachelor programmes in the natural sciences. In addition, there are often many applicants per place on the programmes for which Chinese students do fulfil the entrance requirements. As a result, very few Chinese students start undergraduate study programmes each year (e.g. at Lund University, there were only five Chinese students enrolled in undergraduate programmes in the autumn semester of 2018).⁷

There is reason to believe that Chinese high school students will become increasingly interested in studying abroad already at bachelor level in the near future. In addition to the difficulties Chinese high school students face in being accepted to the better Chinese universities (and this also applies to capable students), an increasing number of Chinese students are enrolled in international baccalaureate programmes at international schools both inside and outside China. Many of these students are not interested in studying in China and they have often been prepared for international studies from an early age. This group of students is interesting in terms of recruitment: they speak/write/read English well, have followed international curricula and therefore generally fulfil Swedish entrance requirements, and these students also have the capacity to finance studies abroad.

2.2 Students' funding

Many Chinese families save money to pay for their children's studies and related expenses without having to take out loans or obtain the money elsewhere. Due to the robust economic development of the country and the strength of the Chinese currency, it is no longer very difficult for Chinese students to finance studies abroad. It should be noted, however, that far from all Chinese families are wealthy enough to bear such costs – many students rely on scholarships to study abroad, particularly those from the relatively poorer inland Chinese provinces.

Those who can afford it do not regard the tuition fees or costs of living in Sweden as prohibitive – in fact, the tuition fees in Sweden are seen as considerably lower than those of the USA (a country many use for comparison). Compared to for instance Germany and the Netherlands, however, Sweden is regarded as a relatively expensive country to live in.

Chinese students are interested in scholarships, and depending on individual circumstances, a scholarship may determine whether a student can study here. Yet relatively few Chinese students count on (or need) comprehensive scholarships – often a smaller scholarship can lead a student to decide to study here.

⁶ <http://bedomningshandboken.uhr.se/utlandska-gymnasiala/alla-lander/kina/>

⁷ Kuben, Lund University's statistical database.

⁸ Source: Daniel Gunnarsson / LUGS coordinator

Since the introduction of tuition fees in 2011, around 120⁸ Chinese students have received some kind of scholarship from for instance Lund University (Lund University Global Scholarship).

In the past, Chinese students had been eligible for the Swedish Institute's scholarship programme for international students, but from 2019 this is no longer the case (the scholarships are funded from the aid budget and are now only awarded to citizens of 34 countries). Chinese students who are admitted to Swedish study programmes can apply for funding via the China Scholarship Council (CSC), but it is not clear how often this happens. Students have to apply themselves and be admitted in competition to apply for CSC scholarships. Earlier the CSC has also mainly shown interest in funding doctoral students.

2.3 Swedish universities' international competitors

Many Chinese students apply to study programmes at several universities in different countries before deciding where to study. Students who qualify for admittance to for example Lund University may reasonably be expected to have the capacity to be admitted to a number of similar universities across the globe.

Swedish universities' greatest international competitors are in Northern Europe: in the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Finland and Norway. Particularly the Netherlands and Germany market themselves aggressively in China, and both countries are popular choices for Chinese students (not least Germany, where tuition is still practically free). DAAD (Germany) and Nuffic Neso (the Netherlands) have maintained a physical presence in China for several years, with the aim of marketing their countries' education, research, etc. In Finland, tuition used to be free for students from outside Europe, but in 2017 tuition fees were introduced and it is not yet clear what the results will be, although it may be expected that developments will be similar to when tuition fees were introduced in Sweden. Tuition is still free in Norway, but the high costs of living deter many foreign students. Denmark attracts a number of Chinese students, but few Danish higher education institutions promote themselves abroad.

3. Marketing

In different markets, Swedish higher education institutions work together to promote Sweden and themselves, but relatively little of this type of cooperation can be seen in China. Most Swedish universities work alone, and there are several reasons for this: China is a relatively "mature" market, and most Swedish universities have worked with the country for a relatively long time. The universities know their partner institutions, have alumni and have the opportunity to participate in many marketing activities, if they choose to invest in them.

When tuition fees were introduced in Sweden, China was identified early on as one of the most important countries for recruitment. There were no established structures or formats for marketing partnerships between universities at that time, so most universities decided to tackle the challenge alone.

The Swedish Institute engages in a number of marketing activities in China to promote Sweden, but has no continuous presence, no dedicated staff for this purpose (this was trialled shortly after the introduction of tuition fees in Sweden, but abandoned within a year), and no office in the country. Embassy and consulate staff assist at events, as well as volunteers from the Sweden Alumni Network in China (SANC).⁹ On the whole, however, the Swedish Institute's initiatives in China are modest compared to those of similar organisations such as Nuffic/Neso (the Netherlands), DAAD (Germany), Campus France (France) and the British Council (UK), etc.

There is some variation in the marketing strategies employed by Swedish universities. For example, Lund University's promotional activities in China include participation in commercial fairs, fairs at partner universities, scholarship competitions, Study/Work in Sweden events, pre-departure events, webinars, other presentations at universities, alumni events, social media activities (particularly on Weibo), and different activities with/organised by agents (presentations, student interviews, training, etc.). No single event can be identified as superior as regards marketing value, and the idea has been to take a broad approach to promoting the university's brand.

3.1 Using agents

Agents form a natural part of the higher education recruitment ecosystem in China. Far from all Chinese students make use of agents when applying to study abroad, but many do, and in some markets the majority of students do so. Agents do not always enjoy a good reputation, but many Chinese students assume that it is easier to be admitted if they use an agent's services. This may be the case if the agents really have expert knowledge of the admission process at a specific higher education institution. This is not relevant in the case of Sweden, because those making admission decisions do not know whether the application was submitted by the student or by an agent.

Students do not always decide themselves to make use of agents – frequently their parents insist. Many Chinese parents have little or very limited opportunities to acquire reliable information on higher education institutions in different countries. This is exacerbated by being unaccustomed to using the Internet and having little knowledge of English. It then seems more secure to use a local agent who can provide information and as well as practical assistance in submitting the application

(and who may be held responsible if anything goes wrong). Agents in China are paid for the services they provide, and the exact amount depends on the type of “package” one chooses. Agents frequently provide assistance in applying to different universities in various countries to maximise students’ chances of being admitted somewhere.

According to information published on the homepage of the International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF),¹⁰ 49% of Chinese students who study abroad make use of agents. There is a particularly strong tradition of using agents when applying to universities in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK. Financial incentives paid to agents (and receiving universities) drive this traffic.

In this context, Sweden is a small player and Chinese agencies are perhaps mainly interested in partnerships to increase the scope of their profiles, rather than in actually doing business and send students here. Swedish universities also have (from the agents’ point of view) the disadvantage of strict entrance requirements, as well as a national admissions system, making Swedish higher education institutions slower and less flexible than those of many other countries.

Agents work on a commission basis and are only paid for students who successfully apply, are admitted, pay tuition fees and arrive to register. If agents are to function optimally, regular training needs to be provided, regular contact is needed, and the university should also participate in the activities organised by the agents (including fairs, presentations at universities or student interviews). This can be both time consuming and expensive, depending on the university’s ambitions. Chinese agencies may have 20–30 offices countrywide and organise touring fairs to all of these three times a year.

3.2 University cooperation

Swedish universities have sometimes used their cooperation with different Chinese universities as a recruitment strategy. Lund University for instance collaborates with several of the top universities in China, such as Peking University, Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Xiamen University and Zhejiang University. There are continual exchanges at different levels, and some faculties/departments are in close contact with their counterparts at some of these universities. As far as student recruitment is concerned, this is an underutilised resource, and here Lund University is behind some other universities that work closely with their partners to recruit students directly from them.

¹⁰ <http://monitor.icef.com/2014/09/the-agent-question-new-data-has-the-answer/>

Many Chinese universities expect their ambitious, internationally-oriented students to go abroad for master-level studies, and often they do not have the capacity to offer their own (international) master programmes or enough places admit as many students as they do at bachelor level.

There are different ways of recruiting students from partner universities – but the matter must first be discussed with these partners. Some initiatives that could be considered include sending academic staff to these universities to hold lectures (and at the same time promote our master programmes). One may also consider guaranteeing students from partner universities discounted tuition fees, or perhaps offering expedited admission procedures (including advance notice of admission), etc.

4. Experiences from Lund University

4.1 Marketing

Commercial fairs have long been a staple of universities recruiting in China, but for Lund University these have become increasingly irrelevant – now students who want to study abroad are relatively sophisticated and they increasingly use the Internet and other channels to obtain information on what and where to study. More focused fairs may still be relevant (e.g. only for EU universities), if the target group is more clearly defined and motivated. Some of our partner universities (Peking University and Fudan University/Nordic Centre) have organised fairs for their partner universities with mixed results.

Digital marketing in China is somewhat problematic, since virtually all of Lund University's regular social media channels have long been blocked in the country (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, etc.). There is no shortage of Chinese alternatives to these, and Lund University for instance has an official Weibo account (just under 6 000 followers at present). The popularity of Weibo has declined in recent years, however, and at present Wechat and QQ are the most popular platforms in China. Unfortunately, foreign companies and organisations that are not officially registered in China are not allowed to open official Wechat accounts (they may open accounts only accessible to users outside China)¹¹. Lund University regularly receives invitations from Chinese internet portals focused on education to advertise or in another way get exposure on these, but has consistently declined such invitations, because the effect seems uncertain and it is expensive. Chinese students frequently indicate that they do not use such portals, or do not trust the information they provide.

¹¹ Editors' note: Several universities in Sweden have circumvented this problem by letting a private user in China register a WeChat channel for them.

Presentations at universities across China have been given – and still are – when opportunities present themselves, and often to audiences of 50–100, depending on the time and place. Many of these presentations had been organised by local agents in collaboration with student organisations at the universities where the presentations are given (agents are otherwise often banned from Chinese university campuses). The results have varied, since Lund University often had little opportunity to influence who turns up, but meeting and listening to Chinese students in their context is rewarding.

Agents often invite interested students to small-scale presentations at their offices, accompanied by conversations/interviews to ensure that students have a reasonable chance of being admitted to Lund University based on their qualifications and other conditions. Often, parents also attend such meetings, as they want to confirm that agents legitimately represent certain universities. At present, Lund University works with four different agencies in China, and in 2017, 29 Chinese master-level students (of a total of 78 fee-paying students, so just over a third) arrived via agencies that Lund University has agreements with.

Pre-departure events are organised when applicants receive their admission decisions – usually at the end of March/start of April. The purpose of these is to give the university an opportunity to meet and speak to admitted students who have to take one of the most important decisions of their lives. Pre-departure events are regarded as an important component of our efforts to improve our conversion rate, and are scheduled for all our most important markets. In China, the embassy in Beijing and consulate in Shanghai organise pre-departure events with the support of the Swedish Institute. Usually the larger Swedish universities participate with on-site staff (the rest participate via Skype).

Webinars have not been used to any great extent by Lund University, but from this year (2018) they will be used to a much greater extent and also more regularly, as both general and country-specific webinars will be held via Adobe Connect. In China, webinars have mainly been used to train agents, but we have also hosted a few webinars for students.

Current students and alumni are often included in our marketing. Typically, we use them to help us with fairs, at webinars, on social media and in our efforts to improve the conversion rate (current students from China for example phone all newly admitted students to give them information and to answer questions about student life in Lund). Pure alumni events have irregularly been organised in Beijing and Shanghai, but unfortunately we have no established, independent alumni network in China, and in this respect we are behind many other recruiting universities.

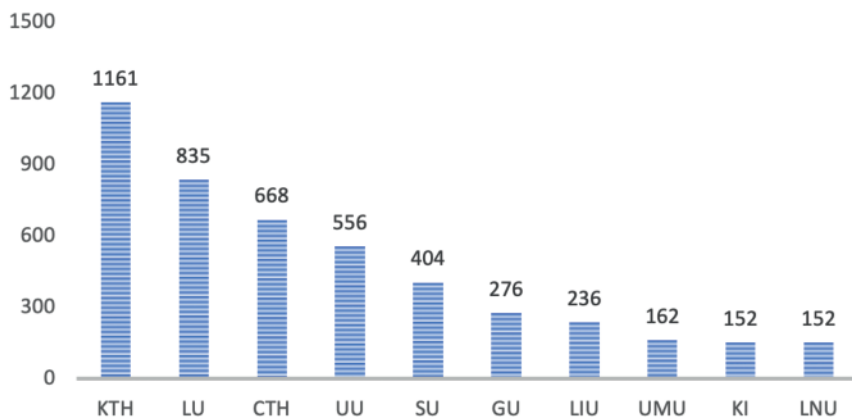
Generally, this is one of our weakest points, because alumni are some of our best and most loyal ambassadors.

4.2 Applicants

During this period, Lund University has been relatively successful. Lund University received 532 applications to master-level programmes in 2011 and 883 applications in 2017¹² – an increase of around 66%

*Autumn semester 2018: Applicants with Chinese qualifications to Sweden (Top 10)*¹³

Master HT 18

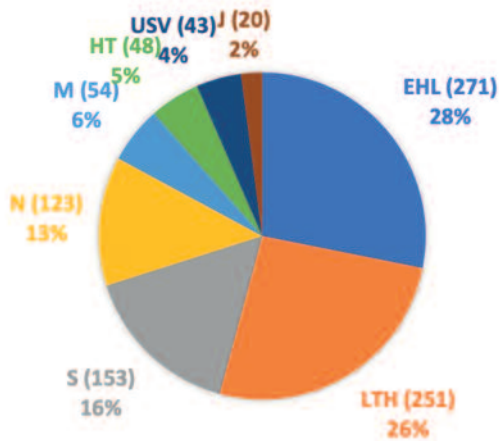


¹² Kuben

¹³ Figures from NyA (Feb. 2, 2018)

A total of 2609¹⁴ students with Chinese qualifications¹⁵ applied to one or more international master programmes in Sweden during the application period for the autumn semester of 2018. Of these, 835 students (around a third) applied to at least one programme at Lund University. The graph below shows which faculties Chinese students applied to at Lund University.

Master HT 18 – Applicants from China to LU (875)



(Source: Kuben, 26 Feb. 2018)

¹⁴Information from NyA (Feb, 2, 2018)

¹⁵The country of qualifications is sometimes used as a proxy for nationality, because nationality may not be recorded.

According to data from Kuben, Lund University received applications from 875 Chinese students as on 26 February 2018. It should be noted that the statistics are based on the country of qualifications. This means that Chinese students who completed their undergraduate studies abroad are not included (if they hold bachelor degrees from Australia, for example, they will be regarded as Australians in Lund's statistics). The School of Economics and Management (EHL) is one of the largest recipients of Chinese students, followed by the Faculty of Engineering (LTH), the Faculty of Social Sciences (S) and the Faculty of Science (N). EHL also distinguishes itself positively as regards the number of first choice applications:

Area/Faculty	Number of applications	First choice applications	Proportion first choice applications
Economics and Management (ELH)	271	185	68%
Engineering (LTH)	251	111	44%
Social Sciences (S)	153	96	63%
Science (N)	123	56	46%
Medicine (M)	54	13	24%
Humanities and Theology (HT)	48	24	50%
University-wide institutes (USV)	43	28	65%
Law (J)	20	11	55%
TOTAL	875	524	60%

EHL is a good example: the faculty offers a broad and attractive selection of international programmes, and students find the kind of programmes they would expect to find at a top-ranked international university (apart from an MBA programme). In addition, one-year versions are offered of many of the programmes, which makes them attractive to students who want to minimise their time studying and the associated financial investment. Finally, if compared internationally, EHL's programmes are competitively priced. S and USV also show above-average results.

Despite Lund University's good reputation in China as a research institution (in particularly engineering, science and medicine), the university underachieves in these disciplines in education. This is mainly explained by the fact that many Chinese students regard KTH Royal Institute of Technology and Chalmers University of Technology as the most prestigious technological universities in Sweden (and Karolinska Insitutet as the best medical university).

Unfortunately, this impression is reinforced by the fact that Lund University’s international programme offering in engineering does not come close to reflecting the university’s capacity. Lund University for instance lacks international programmes in many traditional areas such as civil engineering, mechanical engineering and computer science, to name but a few. It is therefore unlikely that the situation will improve before a broader international programme offering is in place.

4.3 Conversion rate

The conversion rate refers to the number of applicants registered on a study programme in relation to the total number of applicants. The conversion rate of Chinese applicants to Lund University (with the exception of autumn 2012), is usually 8–9% of the total number of applicants from the country. By way of comparison, the conversion rate of some of our other large applicant countries are at 5% (India and Turkey), 3% (Indonesia) and 1% (Bangladesh). In this context, the USA is a positive exception with a conversion rate of 12%, but here one should also keep in mind that there are a much larger component of students exempted from tuition fees from the USA compared with the other countries mentioned (students with dual citizenship or EU citizens who obtained their bachelor qualifications in the USA).

Conversion rate, applicants from China

Application round	Applicants	First choice	Admitted (1)	Admitted (2)	Registered	Conversion rate
Master level, autumn 2011	532	250	124	73	46	8,6%
Master level, autumn 2012	583	302	103	85	29	4,9%
Master level, autumn 2013	596	300	132	107	53	8,9%
Master level, autumn 2014	675	366	135	106	57	8,4%
Master level, autumn 2015	656	358	148	114	58	8,8%
Master level, autumn 2016	796	466	139	97	64	8,0%
Master level, autumn 2017	883	519	192	135	81	9,1%

(Source: Kuben)

Lund University loses (Chinese) students admitted in selection 2 before they actually register. This is often due to the fact that students apply and are admitted to universities in other countries and/or are unwilling or unable to finance their studies in Sweden. Lund University loses admitted students to other countries because the admission decision comes relatively late (at the end of March/start of April) after a long waiting period for the students – over five months in the worst cases, if students applied early. (Our programmes have the possibility of providing so-called preliminary assessment letters giving advance notice of admission, but according to Lund University these are used infrequently and often only at a late stage of the application and admissions process.)

During this period, universities in other countries receive applications, process them and send out definitive admission letters (often requiring an answer within two weeks or similar). Students in this situation are stressed and take up the places they are admitted to, because waiting for a Swedish admission decision that only comes much later is risky (the decision may not even be positive). All of these factors negatively affect the conversion rate at Lund University. Capable Chinese (and other) students are snatched up by universities in other countries while their applications are still being processed in Sweden.

4.4 Origin

The majority of applicants to master-level programmes starting in the autumn of 2018 are from the economically most developed parts of China, with Beijing and Shanghai in the lead. It should however be noted that these statistics are based on what the students indicate upon application. Many Chinese students from different parts of the country are studying in Beijing or Shanghai when they apply to Lund and therefore indicate these cities as their places of residence.

Geographic origins of Chinese first-choice applicants to Lund University (master level, autumn 2018), top 10:

City	Number
Beijing	78
Shanghai	75
Wuhan	18
Hangzhou	15
Guangzhou	13
Shenzhen	12
Chengdu	12
Nanjing	9
Suzhou	9
Tianjin	9

Most of Lund University’s partner universities are located in Beijing or Shanghai (and surroundings), and this may contribute to making Lund an alternative for students in these regions. The connection to Guangdong is weaker, and this is also reflected in the application figures. People from this part of China may also be less inclined to study in the north.

(Source: NyA, Feb. 2, 2018)

5. Summary

Recruiting universities in most parts of the world find Chinese students attractive, because, to a greater degree than students of other nationalities, they have the skills and ambition to successfully complete studies abroad. They can also finance such studies without too many difficulties. In addition, the market is large enough that even small players – like Sweden in this context – have the chance to compete for capable students.

Swedish universities may be able to attract more Chinese students, but systemic changes are needed to ensure more than modest growth. Above all, the entire Swedish application and admissions apparatus needs to be reformed so that it more closely corresponds to its counterparts in the other countries Chinese students apply to. In addition, Swedish universities need to be more willing to process applications on a running basis and to send out advance notices of admissions more quickly to capable students.

At Lund University, the greatest challenges to increased student recruitment from China include:

- The Swedish application and admissions system (slow/inflexible)
- Unclear connection to careers after graduation in some disciplines and limited support from Lund University regarding internships, extra work, jobs
- Impossible entrance requirements (e.g. to bachelor programmes in science)
- Demographics – the number of Chinese students aged 18–24 will decrease in coming years¹⁶

Increased competition, both internationally and nationally (capacity building)

Lund University also has opportunities to increase the proportion of Chinese students without eliminating the challenges above, by:

- Improving collaboration with partner universities
- Establishing proper alumni networks and using these more systematically in recruitment
- Highlighting career opportunities and partnerships with Swedish businesses that want to recruit Chinese staff
- Launching double degrees or joint degree programmes with Chinese partner universities
- Gaining more applicants to and improving the conversion rate of the engineering, medical and science faculties through special initiatives (scholarship competitions, recruitment from partner universities at faculty level, discounts/scholarships to students from partner universities)

Many of the challenges and opportunities faced by Lund University are systematic and can be similar at other higher education institutions and particularly at the larger universities in Sweden.

¹⁶ <http://monitor.icef.com/2017/09/chinas-college-aged-population-decline-2025/>

The Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education, STINT, was set up by the Swedish Government in 1994 with the mission to internationalise Swedish higher education and research.

STINT promotes knowledge and competence development within internationalisation and invests in internationalisation projects proposed by researchers, educators and leaderships at Swedish universities.

STINT promotes internationalisation as an instrument to:

- Enhance the quality of research and higher education
- Increase the competitiveness of universities
- Strengthen the attractiveness of Swedish universities

STINT's mission is to encourage renewal within internationalisation through new collaboration forms and new partners. For example, STINT invests in young researchers' and teachers' international collaborations. Moreover, STINT's ambition is to be a pioneer in establishing strategic cooperation with emerging countries in research and higher education.



STINT

Stiftelsen för internationalisering av
högre utbildning och forskning

The Swedish Foundation for International
Cooperation in Research and Higher Education

Mäster Samuelsgatan 60, 9 tr
P.O. Box 3523, SE-103 69 Stockholm, Sweden
Telephone +46 8 67119 90. Fax +46 8 67119 99
info@stint.se www.stint.se