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Hot on the heels of the November 2014 launch of the Nature Index, we are pleased to present a supplement dedicated to results from China, currently the country with the second largest output in the index. Here we analyse a snapshot of results for papers published between 1 January and 31 December 2013, shining a spotlight on the cities, institutions and individual researchers who have contributed to some of the highest quality research during that time.

The Nature Index is already attracting comments about the window it provides into the scientific literature, and we hope to further the conversation here. The concept is that, by looking at articles from only a small group of journals — those most favoured by researchers — we can offer a new level of analysis that is more targeted and hence more malleable.

We want users to be able to tease out patterns of research, look at trends, analyse individual strengths, and investigate how institutions and countries collaborate.

In this supplement, we start by looking at China as a whole — at its scientific collaborations with other countries, at the spread of its output across four main subject areas, and at its top ten contributing cities.

China is dominated by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), a 60,000-strong research conglomerate,

with headquarters in Beijing. In this supplement, we identify the contributions of the 100-or-so specialized institutes that comprise this research behemoth, looking at the outstanding institutes and researchers within the different disciplines (S56).

We are also able to examine the index data at the city level. Within each city we try to identify hotspots for high-quality research, based not just on output quantity but also on a range of indicators — for example, the number of researchers and the ratio of collaborators — that help put the data in context and allow a more nuanced view of these patterns. However, it is the insights into research at the institutional level that are most revealing. Using the data we are able to drill down to the level of the individual researcher to see who has been most prolific and in what areas (S60).

Our aim with this China-specific supplement is to show the Nature Index's capacity to generate discussion. Every reader of this supplement and user of natureindex.com will have their own specific interests and questions to address. We encourage use of the freely-available data to do just that, and welcome any feedback that arises.

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