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The changing face of China

Jan Carlstedt-Duke describes his trip to China this year as a revelation. Dean of research at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, Carlstedt-Duke says that he was surprised by how much the country has changed in the five years since his previous visit.

China was once a relatively closed-off place that displayed little interest in Western science, Carlstedt-Duke says. Now the country is investing heavily in research, infrastructure and education, and is beginning to welcome Western scientists as both researchers and teachers.

As a result, the Karolinska Institute has teamed up with the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm and Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg to open two offices in China this month. Located at Peking University and Fudan University, the offices will build on existing informal collaborations between the various institutions.

Perhaps the most exciting prospect for young scientists in Sweden and China is the opportunity to build collaborations by working in a different country. "We want to build up our exchange programme at all levels —

undergraduate, PhD students and postdocs," says Carlstedt-Duke. Such programmes should also ease the technology-transfer process and speed the commercialization of research.

Many other Western universities have launched similar programmes in Asia. For example, Johns Hopkins University opened a Singapore outpost in 1998, and there are now several Western universities with offices in Singapore.

With China's recent interest in science, it's reasonable to expect that many more Western universities will head east. "The investment in science and education is growing tremendously," says Carlstedt-Duke. "So I think we will see more collaboration." That will be good news for scientists who want to broaden their research networks.

Paul Smaglik, Naturejobs editor

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