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nature jobs

China syndrome

The US National Science Foundation's *Science and Engineering Indicators 2006* could perhaps be renamed 'Here Comes China'. The biennial report shows an increasingly international science and technology workforce, with China showing large gains in internal investment in R&D, investment by multinational corporations, and numbers of Chinese nationals earning science and engineering doctorates in the United States.

China has increased its R&D investment 24% per year over the past five years, compared with 4–5% for the United States. This growth, from US\$12.4 billion in 1991 to \$84.6 billion in 2003, puts the country behind only Japan and the United States. Meanwhile, investment by US-based multinationals into Asian markets outside Japan has more than doubled, from \$1.5 billion in 1994 to \$3.5 billion in 2002, with more than \$1 billion going into China alone. Finally, Chinese students earn more US science and engineering PhDs than those of any other foreign nation.

These statistics are impressive, but they tell only one side of the story. What do they mean in terms of jobs and who will get them? The United States, Europe and Japan still

produce many PhDs and create a host of jobs. But China is coming on strong. One wild card is whether Chinese PhDs will stay in the United States or return home. While China's PhD production in the United States has increased, PhDs by US white males has dropped from its peak of about 8,900 in 1994 to just over 7,000 in 2003.

It would be premature to say this marks the end of US dominance in science and engineering employment, but it does show that the United States is producing less of its own scientists and may have more difficulty recruiting from abroad as other nations, particularly China, ramp up funding and infrastructure. As the report says, these trends point to a "potentially diminished US success in the increasing international competition for foreign scientists and engineers".



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