

BUILDING A GREAT UNIVERSITY



LIN JIANHUA
The president of
Peking University

Peking University (PKU), one of China's most prestigious, was founded as the Imperial University of Peking in 1898 and became PKU in 1912. For 120 years, it has led scientific and educational innovation in China with its many research breakthroughs and inspiring training programmes. With an academic tradition emphasizing freedom of thought and the integration of different ideas, the university has built an international reputation for its research excellence. Here, its president, Lin Jianhua, outlines his vision for building a world-class university.

HOW DO YOU PERCEIVE PKU'S DEVELOPMENT IN THE LAST 120 YEARS?

Reflecting on our past 120 years, we see great changes and achievements. PKU was founded in 1898 to replace the ancient imperial college, marking the beginning of China's modern higher education. In 1917, when the renowned scholar and educator, Cai Yuanpei, became the president, a series of reforms boosted academic freedom and prosperity, transforming the university into a hub for emerging progressive thought, which has taken China through many hard times and societal changes. PKU was also the first to establish many academic programmes, including mathematics, physics, chemistry, business and some social sciences. We have made significant contributions to the country's development with our research.

In the last 20 years, with the goal to become a world-class university, we have gone through major reforms. Our research budget, along with output, has increased substantially. The latest Nature Index has ranked us ninth among world universities. We are proud to have become a comprehensive university with strong research power.

However, past achievements may become our constraints. In the future we see greater responsibilities and challenges. We need to think about how to sustain our development and innovate to bring a glorious future.

WHAT ARE A UNIVERSITY'S MISSIONS?

In an era when knowledge, technology and socioeconomic development are





interrelated, universities need to have moral and spiritual pursuits. They should seek knowledge for the country and people, pursue truth and nurture talent, as their development is closely linked to the development of society.

At PKU, we aim to provide the best education for future leaders, as we see rearing people as the basis. For this, we need a clear value orientation to guard academic independence, and tirelessly seek truth. Being richly resourced, PKU is committed to the innovation of basic theories, ideas, science and technologies, contributing to national development and advancement of human civilization. It is also the remit of PKU to lead the reform of China's higher education, seeking the improvement of the modern higher education system. We are trying to create a friendly academic environment, making PKU a respected academic institution and rebuilding the credit of universities.

These are summarized by the motto 'integrity, creativity, futurity', guiding our development.

HOW DOES PKU ALIGN WITH THE GOALS OF CHINA'S HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM?

I think the goal of our education reform is to build a system that can improve by itself. This means the system needs to make the most of the potential and creativity of different parties. The specific direction is to integrate general and specialized education, as we believe that while it's the remit of universities to impart subject specialisms, keeping students' confidence,

curiosity and enterprising spirit is more important.

At PKU, educational reform started at the end of the 1990s. To integrate general and specialized education, we have piloted cross-disciplinary training programmes and double-major systems, providing diversified choices to students. We also take a holistic approach to help students better understand themselves, China, society and the world in a whole-person education. Measures are also taken to give teachers greater initiative, to make transferring between courses and departments easier, and to encourage hands-on research. We want undergraduates to benefit from the resources of a research university.

WHAT OTHER REFORMS ARE TAKING PLACE AT PKU?

While educational reform is core, we are reforming our systems in human resources, administration, research and resource allocation, with effects beginning to show.

The reformed human resource system focuses on creating a supportive system and culture for faculty members. To attract talented scholars we piloted the tenure track system, which was rolled out to all new hires in 2014. In 2016, we adjusted the salary system and the promotion paths.

We also encourage scholars to play a greater role in academic governance with a three-level administration system of university, faculty and school/department. Scholars will lead faculties and take charge of academic affairs, while academic committees have been formed to promote

restructuring of the academic system.

Meanwhile, administrative reform focuses on delegating power to lower levels, allowing more say about schools and departments. We are also trying to build a team of professional administrators to better serve students and teachers. Decentralization of resource allocation is planned to allow schools and departments to manage their own budgets, encouraging a more open and sustainable management model.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL FOR BUILDING A FIRST-CLASS UNIVERSITY?

Our development goal is to be among the world-class universities first and then be top-notch around the middle of this century. The core is strengthening academic programmes, reaching excellence in education and research. We need to do this in steps, developing certain strength disciplines first. Essentially, we need to create a friendly academic environment, backed by supportive systems, to attract the most talented people, including the young, and stimulate their creativity. When the brightest minds gather, ideas may emerge, which will advance and inspire research.

China's rapid development provides rich resources and new questions for research. Its tolerant culture makes the Chinese good at integrating different ideas and accepting new things. These enable favourable environments for research, boosting our competitiveness. Moreover, we have abundant human resources, including many talented students. We are confident to lead a first-class university. ■