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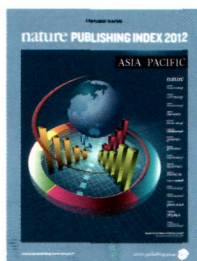
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Most people would agree that the Asia-Pacific is where it's happening. The definition of "it" varies — but from manufacturing to finance, fashion, art, pop music and, increasingly, science, the eyes of the world are focused on the region.

Here we present a picture of high-quality research output from the region through the unique lens of the 2012 Nature Publishing Index, which ranks institutions and countries in the Asia-Pacific.

Over the past few years, the NPI has charted the rise and rise of science in the Asia-Pacific region. The 2012 body of papers in Nature journals continues this trend: there have never been more papers with authors from Asia-Pacific research organizations, either in absolute terms or as a proportion of the total produced (see 'A year of growth', page 6).

Asia-Pacific science is a significant presence on the global stage, with 13 institutions from the region making the top 100 (see page 48). China, in particular, had a strong year and now boasts four institutions on this list, up from three in 2011. Singapore is a new entrant (see page 25), while Japan is down to six institutions (see page 12) and South Korea has dropped out entirely (see page 24).

So what are the major drivers of these trends? External factors have certainly played a role: Japan and, indeed, New Zealand, (see page 28) has been dealing with the aftermath of devastating earthquakes and the consequent diversion of funds and resources.

For China, improved output has been in part the result of increased governmental scientific investment over the past 20 years (see page 18). The country's arrival as a contender to Japan's research dominance was made clear in 2012, and a tipping point may have been reached. The grande dame of Asia-Pacific research — the University of Tokyo — has company at the head of the table: the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) is now neck-and-neck with Todai (as the university is known). Moreover, if we look at a 12-month rolling window (nature.asia/publishing-index-asia-pacific), CAS actually edged ahead in January 2013. Can CAS hold this position throughout the year? Such dynamic competition for supremacy gives the scientific world yet another reason to keep its eyes on the ascendant Asia-Pacific.

Nick Campbell

Head of Nature Publishing Group, Greater China

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